



Date: February 10, 2021
To: Chair Pugh and members of the House Committee on Human Services
CC: Representative Jessica Brumsted
From: Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director, Building Bright Futures, Beth Truzansky, Deputy Director, Building Bright Futures
Re: H. 171: An act relating to the governance and financing of Vermont's child care system

My name is Dr. Morgan Crossman, the Executive Director of [Building Bright Futures](#) (BBF). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to your committee with regard to the role of Building Bright Futures in H. 171: An act relating to the governance and financing of Vermont's child care system.

Building Bright Futures' Role in Vermont's Early Childhood System

As a reminder, BBF is Vermont's early childhood public-private partnership charged under Act 104 to serve as the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood, the mechanism used to advise the Governor and legislature on the status of children in the prenatal period through age eight and their families. BBF's mission is to improve the well-being of children and families in Vermont by using evidence to inform policy and bringing voices together across sectors and within regions to discuss critical challenges and problem-solve. BBF maintains the vision and strategic plan for Vermont's Early childhood system. BBF's infrastructure includes a network of over 450 early childhood stakeholders:

- A network of 12 Regional Councils;
- 7 Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) committees upholding and monitoring the Early Childhood vision and strategic plan for Vermont;
- The State Advisory Council (SAC) brings together cross-sector early childhood leaders to issue recommendations, increase coordination to advance a connected and evolving early childhood system, and advise the Governor and Legislature.

BBF State Advisory Council Recommendations

As you know, the Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (SAC) does not directly support or oppose any specific proposal or bill. Instead, our role is to provide recommendations that move the early childhood system toward the 4 goals identified in Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP). Of note, the BBF SAC did produce a series of 5 recommendations which can be found in the 2020 [How are Vermont's Young Children and Families Report](#), pgs 6-11. The recommendations related to H. 171 are listed below for reference.

RECOGNIZE VERMONT'S EARLY CARE & EDUCATION SYSTEM & WORKFORCE AS ESSENTIAL

Recommendation 1: Fund education costs and compensation for the early childhood education workforce, including scholarships, loan repayment, and wage supplementation.

- Sufficiently fund and expand scholarship programs for early educators and maintain this revenue annually.
- Establish a loan repayment program for early educators.
- Establish a wage supplement program to progress toward adequate compensation for early educators.
- Prioritize workforce development and hazard pay for this sector.



Recommendation 2: Continue investment in redesigning the state's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) by making progress in alignment with Year 3 of the state's 5-year plan, including:

- Increase the CCFAP rate paid to early care and education providers so those reimbursement rates closely reflect the true cost of high-quality care thereby reducing the burden on early care and education programs to subsidize the system through low wages and other cost-saving efforts.
- Fully support needed investments in the technology system(s), staff and resources required to implement the redesigned CCFAP structure and providing an accessible platform for families, educators, and administrators.

EVOLVE OUR DATA SYSTEM TO ADDRESS GAPS

Recommendation 3: Fully fund existing early childhood data initiatives to fidelity: Early Childhood Information System (e.g. Bright Futures Information System, Children's Integrated Services) and the State Longitudinal Data System.

Recommendation 4: Create an early childhood budget that identifies all financial sources dedicated to children and their families from prenatal to age eight to monitor, align and leverage financial resources.

**Considerations for H. 171 Section 12, page 14-16
EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION GOVERNANCE STUDY**

BBF's ROLE: BBF has been named to undertake an analysis that evaluates and makes recommendations regarding early care and education governance, the results of which will be reported to the General Assembly by January 15, 2022. This is an important topic worthy of formal study and critical to supporting children and families statewide and BBF was initially created for exactly this purpose; to have the flexibility and robust infrastructure to adapt to emerging legislative, community, public and private early childhood needs. The Blue Ribbon Commission laid the foundation for this analysis. This work is in line with our mandate under Act 104, our mission of using evidence and data to inform policy, and our neutral convenor role. BBF is well-poised to execute this analysis.

FUNDING: In order to execute a task of this magnitude we need financial resources to support additional staffing and a contractor. The request in H. 171 is comparable to the state's previous work in 2015-2019 to execute the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality Affordable Child Care, which included the need for additional staff and the hiring of a contractor to support the work. The Blue Ribbon Commission also took place over one and a half years, resulting in critical information consistently referenced by early childhood partners and the legislature. We ask that you consider the following financial, staffing, participation implications:

- A 1-time expense of \$200,000 to (1) hire a contractor to support project management, administrative tasks, meeting facilitation, synthesis of meeting/focus group notes, report development and legislative testimony and (2) to support BBF staff time to oversee all aspects of the study (planning, agenda development, facilitation guide development and facilitation support, coordination and organization of planning teams, attendance at working group meetings, participant outreach, report writing, ongoing legislative testimony).



TIMING: We ask that you consider an extended timeline. Analyzing the early childhood education governance and administrative infrastructure is important. The current timing would require all meetings, interviews, focus groups, data compilation, analysis, recommendation development and drafting a final report to happen within a 6-month period, which is not sufficient. BBF is committed to a full and high quality process to secure a contractor, allocate appropriate BBF staff time, and to ensure necessary participation of agency leadership and statewide partners in focus groups, interviews/meetings, and surveys. **Based on lessons learned from the process and timeline for executing the Blue Ribbon Commission, I strongly urge the committee to consider a longer timeline with findings reported at least 6 months to one year later.**

BBF affirms the need for this study section and believes in our ability to execute this work successfully if appropriately funded. We appreciate the committee's willingness to consider additional resource allocation for this bill.

Considerations for H. 171 Section 14, page 20-23
EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

BBF's ROLE: The bill as proposed names BBF to develop and facilitate a new "Early Care and Education Governance and Administration Advisory Committee" to advise the Department for Children and Families' Child Development Division on services pertaining to child care and early education regulation. As otherwise noted, BBF has the process expertise to convene and facilitate this group. Currently, BBF maintains 7 Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) Committees with consistent participation from many, if not all of the stakeholders required in the proposed membership of the Early Care and Education Governance and Administration Advisory Committee. BBF is the right entity to convene this group and it is important for BBF to review the existing committee infrastructure and work toward improved efficiency, effectiveness, and integration and not duplicating efforts.

FUNDING: BBF will be able to execute the role named in H. 171 for the \$25,000 allotted annually for the duration of hosting the specialized committee (through 2023).

Thank your consideration of these topics and for continuing to keep children and families at the center of our decision-making.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Morgan K. Crossman".

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