

To the members of the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations:

My name is Alicia Ayles and I reside in Rutland City, VT. I am writing to request that you support Governor Scott's proposed investments in early childhood education and care in this year's budget. To do so will send a distinct and far-reaching message to families and our most precious young children confirming that they are genuinely respected and fully recognized.

I have my Master's degree in Pediatric Audiology along with an undergraduate degree from UVM and a current VT license in Elementary Education (K-6). I worked previously as a consultant specializing in childhood hearing loss and related educational/communication access needs for fifteen years in both the Northeast and Southwest regions of Vermont. I am currently seeking an endorsement in Early Childhood Education.

Much of my consultant work was devoted to children ages B-8 years and their families. I have collaborated extensively with early education and care professionals and various related healthcare providers. I am actively involved in community engagement and stay informed of the continual barriers facing children and families in our state. One of these key barriers is that most families pay **more** than 10% of their income on childcare, some as much as 30%. This high cost of care makes it very challenging, disheartening and overwhelming for parents and caregivers.

From all of my comprehensive conversations, observations and hands-on time with children and families, it is evident that meaningful and developmentally appropriate early education and care is the **most** necessary foundation for exceptional educational and societal outcomes.

I have witnessed firsthand many successes stemming from this solid foundation and the sincere commitment to honoring and consistently funding reputable early childhood programs. Individual success and family fulfillment is truly possible with a unified and culturally sensitive approach, compassionate listening, strong needs assessment, sustainable structure and resolute funding.

As adult models of service in our communities, we are in a time of tremendous opportunity to make sincere commitments to profoundly valuing our current and future generations. We must examine the difficult truths that this pandemic accentuates and make concrete decisions to fund what is most crucial as we recover and heal as a people. Our communities prosper when families are wholly appreciated, safe and understood.

It is imperative that working parents have affordable, sustainable, equitable and reliable high-quality education and care for their children to be able to comfortably and effectively re-enter and maintain positions in the workforce. This will not only keep Vermont's economy viable, it will set an extraordinary example in our nation and hopefully attract more families to our remarkable state. We want and **need** new families here. The assurance of available, affordable and adequately funded high-quality early childhood care as a state priority will be an enormous incentive for them to come and ultimately decide to stay.

Thank you for your time, devoted efforts and dedicated service during this critical juncture to support healthy and affirmative outcomes for **all** our Vermont citizens. Please contact me if you would like to discuss anything further or have specific questions. I look forward to us all taking the necessary next steps for our wonderful children and families! Let's invest in our very best!

Sincerely,
Alicia R. Ayles, MA/aylesa98@yahoo.com/860-377-5277