



To: Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs
Senator Michael Sirotkin, Chair

From: Sarah Kenney, Chief Policy Officer, Let's Grow Kids

Date: April 5, 2022

Re: Child care needs in H.703 (workforce development) and H.740 (SFY23 budget)

On behalf of Let's Grow Kids, our partners, and our 35,000 supporters, thank you for your actions during the pandemic to invest in preserving Vermont's child care system. It has made a difference. And yet, as the pandemic continues, the child care system is on yet another dangerous precipice: a staffing crisis so acute that programs are closing classrooms, shortening hours, or closing altogether. I know your committee agrees that the early childhood education workforce is key to creating stability for our broader workforce and our state's economic recovery. You have heard it time and time again through testimony across multiple sectors of the economy: without access to child care, employees cannot work, and Vermont businesses cannot thrive.

In a recent survey of early childhood education programs in Vermont, 71% of center-based programs reported experiencing a staffing shortage ([NAEYC](#)). This lack of early childhood educators has resulted in a significant shortage of child care throughout the state, impacting every sector of our economy.

As your committee works on H.703 and drafts budget recommendations to share with the Senate Appropriation Committee, we ask that you consider the following needs related to child care.

H.703 (An act relating to promoting workforce development):

Let's Grow Kids requests two important changes to the bill: one initiative that was not included in the version of the bill that passed the House, and one edit to language in Section 37 of the bill.

- 1. Let's Grow Kids strongly recommends adding a one-time investment of \$125,000 to establish and fund an early childhood educator (ECE) outreach and recruitment initiative.** Vermont must create a robust workforce development strategy for early childhood educators as the state has done for other fields central to Vermont's economy. The Legislature could accomplish this by directing CDD to contract with a nonprofit entity to undertake a coordinated, resourced, time-limited outreach and recruitment initiative that attracts talented educators and caregivers into the field. A total of \$125,000 would support a consultant or temporary staff person for a year to work with middle and high schools and CTEs, CCV, DOL, and other existing partners to help recruit new early educators to the field and support them in navigating the many opportunities that exist for those interested in the field of ECE. This person would also help child care programs, as employers, to promote and take advantage of opportunities for their staff—both new hires and current staff—to advance in the field. The initiative would also coordinate disparate efforts happening locally

to create a more uniform entry-level training program for new early childhood educators across the state.

- 2. In Section 37, we request an edit to the language.** The amendment in this section (on page 54 of the House-passed bill) is intended to provide a technical fix to the new student loan repayment assistance program that was established in last year's landmark child care bill (H.171/Act 45). The Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC) has been awarded the contract to administer this new program and has discovered two minor technical fixes that are necessary to ensure that early childhood educators who work in child care programs that close in the summer (including, but not limited to, Head Start programs) are still able to access loan repayment support. The current language in Section 37 attempts to address this problem but isn't technically accurate since many employees are not under contract. The language instead should be adjusted as follows:

§ 3543. STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE

(a)(1) There is established a need-based student loan repayment assistance program for the purpose of providing student loan repayment assistance to any individual employed by a regulated, privately operated center-based child care program or family child care home.

(2) An eligible individual shall:

- (A) work in a privately operated center-based child care program or in a family child care home that is regulated by the Division for at least an average of 30 hours per week ~~for 48 weeks of the year~~, inclusive of employer-approved time off;
- (B) receive an annual salary of not more than \$50,000.00 through their work in regulated child care; and
- (C) have earned an associates or bachelor's degree with a major concentration in early childhood, child and human development, elementary education, special education with a birth to age eight focus, or child and family services within the preceding five years.

(3) To participate in the program set forth in this section, an eligible individual shall submit to the Department for Children and Families documentation expressing the individual's intent to work in a regulated, privately operated center-based child care program or family child care home for at least the 12 months following the annual loan repayment award notification, inclusive of any known seasonal layoffs. A participant may receive up to \$4,000.00 annually in student loan repayment assistance, which shall be distributed by the Department in four allotments. The Department shall distribute at least one-quarter of the individual's total annual benefit after the individual has completed three months of employment in accordance with the program. The remainder of an individual's total annual benefit shall be distributed by the Department every three months after the initial payment.

H.740 (An act relating to making appropriations for the support of government):

Let's Grow Kids requests that the following be included in your state budget recommendations to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

1. **Please recommend that Senate Appropriations include in the budget \$125,000 for the ECE outreach and recruitment initiative detailed above.**
2. **Please recommend a \$100,000 appropriation to continue the Pre-Apprenticeship program that was initially funded in H.171/Act 45 last year.** This program has proven successful, with 17 students enrolled at 7 CTEs. These students are receiving credits, pay, and valuable experience toward a future career in early childhood education. With an additional \$100,000, the program can be expanded to at least 25 students for the next school year.
3. **Please recommend language to create a statutory framework for child care capacity building and business development support for child care programs.** Establishing in statute a child care capacity development program will support child care businesses of all types to open, expand, and remain operational. Language to accomplish this was introduced this year in H.676.

We would be happy to speak more with your committee about any of these requests. Thank you again for your strong support for our child care system and the early childhood educators who have been working tirelessly through the pandemic under extremely difficult circumstances. We look forward to working with your committee this year and into the future to stabilize and strengthen this dedicated, skilled workforce that supports employees to get to work *and* helps to grow Vermont's workers of the future. Thank you for your consideration.