



Date: April 15th, 2021

To: Senate Health and Welfare

From: Morgan Nichols - State Director, Main Street Alliance of Vermont

Re: H.171: Child Care is Essential

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My name is Morgan Nichols and I am the State Director of Main Street Alliance of Vermont. We thank the Committee and the legislature writ large for all that they are doing to support Vermonters through this challenging time and we thank you for the opportunity to present on behalf of Main Street Alliance of Vermont's small business owners who believe that when policy serves our workers, our families, and our communities, it serves to create a broader and more equitable economy where our businesses can thrive.

Main Street Alliance of Vermont's businesses represent the cornerstones of our communities, the places where we come together, and it is these businesses that help to shape our identity as a state. Many of our members are the smallest businesses here in Vermont, including our many sole-proprietors. These businesses all harness their entrepreneurial spirit and creativity to make a living, deliver goods and services, provide good jobs, and contribute to our economy. COVID-19 has laid bare the cracks within our systems and the glaring lack of high-quality, affordable, and available child care has had crippling impacts on our membership. We strongly support H.171 and know that when implemented, this policy will have positive and intersectional impacts throughout our state.

Our members are directly impacted by the lack of childcare - From the business owner whose employee can't return to work because there are no available child care spaces in their community, to the son who had to make the crushing decision to leave his multi-generational family business to take a higher paying job to afford child care for his infant. The lack of a strong, vibrant, and equitable child care system has impacts on every rung of the economic ladder. We also know that the lack of child care has substantive barriers for women and women of color in the workforce as we have seen both here in Vermont and across the country with over 2.3 million women leaving the workforce nationally and at its highest, women making up 73% of Vermont's

unemployed. Decades of progress towards gender equity have been undone, practically overnight.

In a survey issued by Main Street Alliance of Vermont and VBSR, 42.7% of business owners indicated that lack of child care is a challenge for their employees' ability to return to work. As we not only recover from COVID-19 but also grapple with our state's shrinking demographics, the investment in our child care infrastructure proposed in H.171 will also help to further attract and retain young working families to Vermont and this will only help our economy recover more quickly.

Within the last few months, I have had the privilege to speak with many women business owners from throughout Vermont. Women who have are doing everything they can to make it work - juggling their business, juggling their families, their households and doing what they can to take care of themselves during this pandemic and for all of them, child care comes up as a significant barrier for their ability to sustain and/or grow their business.

"When the pandemic hit, the most shocking thing about being pregnant, a solopreneur and mother to a three year old, wasn't the overnight cancellation of all of my in-store tastings, events and essentially my business or the horrifying unknowns about giving birth during a global pandemic; I ran with the punches and by the time I gave birth, six weeks after the state originally shut down, I had a return to work plan. I'd be back at the Stowe Farmers' Market by August or September and my three year old would be in preschool around the same time. What forced me to shut down my business was the permanent closure of my daycare two weeks after I gave birth. Finding a spot for my daughter that mirrored the care I gave her at home (primarily outside and child led) had taken 18 months of searching, interviewing, and trying out a few daycares that weren't the right fit. I knew I couldn't take that on again with a newborn in tow, while trying to run my business and balance the pandemic. Something had to give and it was my career."

- Marikje Shelmandine, Owner of It's Arthur's Fault! Sauces Lady Boss Sauce, LLC - Jericho

"As a sole-proprietor and parent of young children, if I don't have affordable childcare, I cannot run my business. Vermont is full of vibrant sole-proprietorships run by parents who value the flexibility and challenge of running their own business. We need to encourage creativity and innovation in our communities by making it easy for entrepreneurs to have access to childcare while they build and run their businesses."

- Julia Rogers - MSA-VT Board Member and Owner of EnRoute Gap Year Consulting - Stowe

We know that Vermonters need a child care solution as soon as possible. In order for this bill to move forward efficiently and effectively, we support Let's Grow Kids call to move the Financing Study up to a January 1, 2023 deadline and to ensure that there is funding to support those who are conducting these studies. We must take this opportunity to champion bold solutions that develop a sustainable child care infrastructure so that all families have access to affordable and high quality child care and our valued early-childhood educators receive sustainable and equitable compensation.

We thank you so much for the opportunity and for your time and consideration.