



To: The House Committee on Human Services, Chair Wood and Chair Brumsted

From: Sharron Harrington, Interim Executive Director

Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

Date: March 31, 2023

Re: Child Care and Early Childhood Education Compensation

Thank you for inviting us to speak with you today. My name is Sharron Harrington, and I am serving as the Interim Executive Director for the [Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (VTAEYC). I stepped into this role one month ago after serving on the Board of Directors for the past five years.

As you may already know, VTAEYC is the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This nonprofit organization was established 50 years ago by a group of early childhood educators who recognized the need for a professional network in Vermont to represent and support the broad range of professional roles in early childhood education. Since then, VTAEYC members have come together to offer ongoing professional development, support the growth of the early childhood education workforce, build public understanding of early childhood education, and advocate for young children, their families, and themselves. Our Mission is to advance equity and excellence in early childhood education with early childhood educators as our foundation. As a membership organization, we provide resources and advocate for policies that move early childhood education forward now and for the future. We are proud to have grown to 500 members and have the highest member retention rate in the country. As Susan shared with you, Vermont early childhood educators are actively engaged in the Advancing as a Profession initiative and are well informed. Our eNewsletter has nearly 4,000 subscribers with almost a 50% open rate. I share this with you to illustrate the close relationship VTAEYC has with Vermont early childhood education programs and educators. On behalf of our members, I deeply appreciate your Committee's work, as well

as your understanding that compensation is crucial to solving the child care crisis for Vermont. It has been a few years since I testified to this committee, and I know how hard you have been working on this issue. Thank you for your actions in the past to support early childhood education in Vermont and your continued commitment and dedication.

In my testimony today, I want to share an overview of the workforce programs currently being administered by VTAYEC and how valuable these investments have been as a bridge to addressing compensation as laid out in Act 45 of 2021. Due to our limited time, I recognize that I may not be able to provide the level of detail you may desire. If so, I would be happy to come back.

As this Committee knows well, Vermont has a severe shortage of early childhood educators which has a direct correlation to equitable access to early learning for Vermont's children and child care capacity. As Lauren Hogan, from NAEYC, and Susan have shared, low compensation is a barrier to early childhood workforce recruitment and retention and the Audacious Vision that each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality, affordable early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared and well compensated workforce.

I would like to begin by sharing VTAEYC's [resources and programs](#) that support early childhood educators at various points in their career. Many of these programs are in partnership and collaboration with the Child Development Division and other State partners.

- For **career awareness**, we offer [materials](#) and presentations on early childhood education as a career to teens and adults. For example, VTAEYC partners with CCV to facilitate Early Childhood Education Career Access Days across the state. Last spring, 600 middle school students in Bennington learned about early childhood educator career opportunities and another presentation is scheduled this week in Montpelier.
- Last year, the Legislature appropriated funding to allow VTAEYC to continue operating a **pre-apprenticeship program**, funded through the Department of Labor, to build a professional pathway from high school into the early childhood education workforce. Students enrolled in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are getting training and practicum experience as they work in child care programs and earn hours towards a Registered Apprenticeship. High school students can earn college credits and receive a stipend to work with children under the supervision of a mentor. Since this program began in 2020, despite the pandemic, 40 students have participated in this program.

- For career preparation for those currently employed in the workforce, we partner with the VT Department of Labor to offer the **Vermont Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship Program**. Apprentices document 4,000 hours of supervised on-the-job training and complete a specific sequence of six college courses. Over the past four years, since VTAEYC began leading this program, 31 early childhood educators have participated.
- The Legislature has seen the importance of investing in early childhood educator career development for years. These investments have allowed us to offer **T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood VERMONT**, an evidence-based scholarship program designed to make education affordable and accessible for those working in ECE. This is for those already working in a regulated program for 30 hours/week and supports educators seeking Apprenticeship, AA, BA, and Teacher Licensure. The goal of T.E.A.C.H. is to provide debt-free higher education to those currently working in the early care and learning field through:
 - Comprehensive scholarships that cover the costs of college coursework, books, travel, time each week during the workday to complete coursework, support from T.E.A.C.H. staff to help participants navigate balancing work, school, and family needs;
 - Annual educational attainment goals ensuring that participants stay on track in completing their target credential and an annual bonus through T.E.A.C.H. and their employer.
 - This program is currently serving 89 early educators: 15- Apprentices, 34- AA, 19- BA, and 2 working to attain teacher licensure.
 - Thank you for establishing this program in statute as part of Act 45 of 2021. It continues to be an essential support for early childhood educators who are currently in the profession to advance their credentials. This program has resulted in an amazing workforce retention rate of 90%.
- Act 45 also established a new program to address early childhood educator recruitment and retention. We were excited to add the new **Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program for the Early Childhood Workforce** to our portfolio last year as a result of that legislation. Since launching less than one year ago, 45 applicants qualified, who together carry a loan debt of over one million dollars. An equal number of applicants failed to qualify due to the narrow eligibility criteria. The Federal student loan pause and possible loan forgiveness, also contributed to under enrollment. We anticipate this program to be fully utilized with the newly expanded eligibility and have 48 applications ready to be processed.
- VTAEYC, with the financial support of an anonymous donor, recently launched the **Education Gap Grant for Early Childhood Educators** for individuals who are seeking additional credentials and need a small amount of funding to address a barrier to continuing their education.
- VTAEYC is also partnering with The Curtis Fund and CCV to manage the application process and determine student eligibility for [The Curtis Fund Commitment: A Comprehensive Scholarship for Early Childhood Educators](#). This program is for 2023

high school graduates that complete a Career Technical Education (CTE) program in early childhood education and/or human services and are continuing on to complete CCV's Child Care Certificate program. The scholarship covers tuition and fees plus a monthly stipend beginning in fall 2023.

- VTAEYC also administers the VT Child Development Division professional development and program grants and bonuses.

Through each of these programs administered by VTAEYC, we collect data and hear personal stories from participants. This data supports the anecdotal evidence that child care programs report from all over the state: wages are so low, they cannot recruit or retain staff. Directors report that even entry level staff expect at least \$20 an hour based on what they can earn elsewhere, but the data shows that even the most highly educated staff in the current workforce earn on average only \$17.79 per hour, or about \$37,800 per year. According to our 2022 T.E.A.C.H. data, early childhood educators completing an AA degree averaged \$15.66 per hour and those completing a BA averaged \$19.67 per hour. The low wages for directors also make it difficult to maintain pedagogical leadership within the field.

In order to retain current early childhood educators, recruit new early educators to the field, and expand capacity so that more families can access the early childhood education they need, Vermont must make comprehensive, long term investments in compensation for early childhood educators. We hear from VTAEYC members and others in the field that educators are leaving work they love or not finding their way to early childhood education at all because they simply can not afford to pay their bills. As you know, at a time when the labor market is increasingly tight, Vermont must do more for this foundational workforce.

We want to allow sufficient time for your questions. In closing, I would like to once again express our deep gratitude for your time and many years of focusing on early childhood education in Vermont. Thank you.