

Testimony at Vermont State House – Appropriations Committee – Heather Thomas (Wells, Vermont)

Tuesday, February 21, 2023

My name is Heather Thomas, and I'm here today with my daughter Alice. We live in Wells, Vermont in Rutland County. I grew up in the town next to where I live now, moved away for college and my career for about 10 years, and returned in 2011, purchased a home and started a small business.

I'm here today to tell you about the crises – the crisis of provider options and the crisis of access to child care opportunities in Vermont. I support the Governor's proposed investment in the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) in the FY24 budget, as well as additional investments to support Vermont's children, families, early childhood educators, and child care programs of all types.

In 2016 when I was welcoming my daughter it became very clear that she would be with me at work every day, because there were simply *no* daycare options available in our area. Even if there had been an opening, the cost of childcare was prohibitive for me to cover as a single mother running a small business and a household.

At this time, according to Bright Futures, there are three child care options within 10 miles of my town. I spoke to one of the providers this morning who runs a registered home program. She has no full time openings next September, no full time availability right now, 5 families on a waitlist and she has received 6 calls in the last two weeks about her availability. Prospective home buyers call her about availability because child care is a determining factor for families choosing to relocate here, and for families choosing to stay or move out of the area.

We need to attract and retain working families in our communities, allow them the opportunity for full-employment and financial stability, while ensuring proper care and support for our children. I fully support funding high-quality early care and learning and afterschool programs for our youth, and, for the betterment of our families, I ask the legislature to pass a bill to truly address these crises, rather than providing half measures that do not address the urgency and complexity of the issues at hand.