

My name is David Watts. I am the Director of Human Resources at Simon Pearce, with manufacturing, retail and restaurant staff in Windsor, Quechee and Burlington. We employ nearly 200 employees in Vermont. I am also a Windsor County resident with two children, aged 15 and 4.

- My family has the good fortune to have free, full-day pre-K through our town's elementary school. We live in a high tax, high income town that is able to provide this service. But since state investment in child care funding overall is currently so insufficient and inconsistent, this means that we have options that other Vermonters—including our employees—in other parts of the state do not. Our current child care system exacerbates the opportunity and income gap between towns and regions in Vermont. It's unfair and inequitable that access to quality care for young children varies based on zip code.
- At Simon Pearce, we have had the good fortune to experience significant growth in demand for our products and services in the last three years in all business lines - web, wholesale and retail. Without question, the most significant restriction to our growth is the limited availability of workers.
- Using Windsor County population data¹ and an estimate of approximately 2,900 workers entering the workforce when affordable, accessible child care becomes reality, approximately 207 parents would be able to enter the workforce in Windsor County. An influx of workers would have a significant impact on recruitment, retention and reliability at Simon Pearce, and thereby service and productivity. We will finish a 2,000 square foot glassblowing floor expansion in the next three months; finding people to be glassblowers, warehouse workers and restaurant staff will add dozens of well paying, fully benefited jobs in the Upper Valley.
- This problem is bigger than any one community or business can solve: I see this in my own community and I admire the hard work people are doing throughout the Upper Valley to build child care capacity with grant funding. I do what I can to give voice to this issue as an employer and a board member of Vital Communities, an organization with a deep commitment to solving the child care crisis in the Upper Valley. However, local and regional solutions can't solve for low wages; local solutions can't solve the lack of access; local solutions can't solve for affordability.
- As a parent, citizen and employer, I urge you to take the bold and right step to invest in Vermont's child care system that will serve all Vermonters.

¹ 2020 U.S census data. Vermont population: 643,503. Windsor County population: 57,753 (9% of state population)