

James Moore, Co-Founder and President of SunCommon. I live here in Montpelier, where my wife and I have three kids in elementary and middle school. Our youngest, Luisa, just entered kindergarten so early childhood schooling is a very recent memory.

SunCommon believes business should create positive change and help solve the world's biggest problems.

Our mission is to accelerate the transition to solar power in our communities because ensuring a habitable planet is the most important work of our lifetimes.

SunCommon is based in Waterbury, and is part of iSun which is headquartered in Williston. All told we have more than 300 employees working to accelerate that transition to solar power.

The lifeblood of our business is our people, our staff who work really hard, are very dedicated, and are carving out a living here in Vermont. So, I thought sharing their voices with you today would be the best testimony I could offer...

My wife and I did the math when our daughter was little and spending 1/3 of her take-home income for high quality care and preschool didn't make a lot of sense. She delayed her career by more than 2 years to stay home and/or work part-time.

While I may not have a child now, my wife and I have wanted to have one for a very long time. Vermont's lack of early childhood care, coupled with its high cost and inflation have us feeling almost hopeless. Vermont has a rapidly aging population because barely anyone can afford to have a kid, it's not about a lack of jobs. We both love our jobs but have considered moving out of the state in order to have a kid.

Finding and affording child care for our family has been a massive challenge, and it is only an incredible stroke of luck in finding a spot that meant both my partner and I could keep our jobs, after more than 10 months of searching (a task that became its own part-time job).

We spend over 25% of our take-home income on child care. While that number is shocking and painful for our family, from talking to other parents, many are spending far more than that and it's hurting everyone involved.

The teachers I've talked to are making less than (or just barely) a livable wage for work that is vital for our communities. Since our daughter started child care 9 months ago, the turnover in teachers at her center and in her classroom has been very high, and low pay is almost certainly a factor in that. She has incredible

teachers, and seeing wonderful people leave is both disheartening and avoidable.

Additionally, the inability to retain staff has affected the hours our child care center is open. 25+ days where they've either closed early or closed for the whole day due to a lack of staffing.

If Vermont wants to be a leader in making child care accessible and affordable for everyone, and if we want to attract and retain a vibrant young workforce, we need to do far better for our children, their families, and their teachers. If we're able to do that, our future will be immeasurably transformed.

My wife and I were strongly committed to the idea of our son having a sibling, which has changed the course of our life, and I obviously wouldn't change a single thing about that! Except maybe... I would change the state/country's mandate to assist young parents.

The pandemic eventually forced my wife's employer to sell their business, eliminating her marketing position at the tail end of her maternity leave, so we're in the single-income-two-kids experiment right now.

With due respect to all my coworkers, you know well that raising kids is much more labor intensive than what we're doing here at the office. The idea that our culture doesn't recognize the value of that work or even attempt to offset some of it with a universal child care standard is really hard for us to understand. It's infuriating, but the rewards of parenting can outweigh just about anything, we persist.

We're really at a point where the ability to have kids feels like a luxury. I can't tell you the percentage of my friends that aren't having/postponing kids due to the high cost of living, but it's a majority. What kind of culture are we paving the way for with this imbalance of priorities?

This is why I am here today. It is for our staff, who are the heart and soul of SunCommon. Early childhood education is an investment in Vermont's future, but I'm not talking about just the kids who will benefit. I believe the system as it is structured today doesn't serve our communities, doesn't serve our businesses, and certainly doesn't serve our young families.

Thank you for grappling with this issue, with working to address our housing crisis which also acutely impacts our staff, and for working to ensure Vermont does our part to address our climate crisis.