



Date: Tuesday, March 21, 2023

To: Vermont Senate Committee on Finance
Senator Ann Cummings, Chair

From: Sarah Kenney, Chief Policy Officer, Let's Grow Kids

Re: Statement of Support for S. 56

Let's Grow Kids is deeply appreciative of the work that the members of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare have done to strengthen S. 56, based on testimony from numerous witnesses. At a time when Vermont's child care system is in crisis, this bill provides a strong pathway forward to better support children and their families, early childhood educators, and our communities.

Child care is essential, and the past three years have been devastating for Vermont's already fragile child care system. The impact of the pandemic and widespread workforce shortages presented unprecedented challenges. Unsurprisingly, early childhood educators and child care programs have risen to the occasion again and again, providing crucial supports to families and employers even while their day-to-day work has been extraordinarily difficult. With pandemic aid having recently ended and workforce shortages still plaguing the field, child care investments present both a key solution to Vermont's broader workforce crisis and a vital opportunity to address longstanding structural challenges and inequities in our child care system.

In 2021, the legislature passed H. 171 (now Act 45), which laid the foundation to achieve an equitable, affordable, and accessible early childhood education system in Vermont by the end of 2025. Act 45 set important goals for our state:

- Ensure that all families with young children have affordable access to high-quality child care and early education, including ensuring that no Vermont family spends more than 10% of their annual income on child care; and
- Ensure that Vermont's early childhood educators are fairly compensated and well supported.

While Act 45 established important interventions to stabilize Vermont's early childhood education system in the midst of a global pandemic, the system has continued to struggle and is in crisis. In a survey of child care centers this past fall, 86% of programs reported experiencing staffing shortages.

As currently drafted, S. 56 provides concrete steps forward to address this crisis and makes critical investments in our state's early childhood education system including vital support for families, early childhood educators, and child care programs. **As the bill moves forward, we strongly encourage you to support the excellent work of your colleagues and fully fund the proposals in S.56.**

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues on behalf of the thousands of children, parents, employers, community stakeholders, and Vermonters from every corner of the state who have come together in this moment. Vermonters cannot go another year without an equitable solution to the child care crisis and they are relying on our leaders to work together to get this done. Thank you for your time and attention, and most importantly, your commitment to Vermont's youngest children.