



Date: February 20, 2025
To: Chair Scheu and Chair Perchlik and members of the House and Senate Committees of Appropriations
CC: Representative Rey Garofano and Senator Martine Larocque Gulick, Legislative members on the State Advisory Council
From: Flor Diaz Smith, SAC Private Co-Chair; Vermont School Boards Association
Re: Building Bright Futures' Budget Allocation

My name is Flor Diaz Smith, I am the Private Co-Chair of Building Bright Futures' State Advisory Council and the President of the Vermont School Board Association. I am submitting this testimony in support of Building Bright Futures' (BBF) budget allocation increase. Access to high quality education and early care and learning is a human right. Having grown up in a country that did not have a strong public education and early care and learning system, I know that these systems are the fabric of a strong democracy and the key to successful communities.

In my role as SAC Private Co-Chair, I have a front row seat to the many complex facets of BBF's work and contributions to the early childhood system in Vermont. Our mission, **"to improve the well-being of children and families in Vermont by using evidence to inform policy and bringing voices together across sectors and within regions to discuss critical challenges and problem-solve,"** requires robust coordinated efforts across agencies, sectors, and communities. The BBF team staffs and supports twelve regional councils, seven Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan committees and the State Advisory Council, convening over 500 people each month. Vermont's Early Childhood Data and Policy Center gathers and synthesizes data across agencies in order to provide a holistic picture of how policy decisions are impacting children and families. To do this work well requires considerable staff time, expertise and resources.

In the face of unprecedented uncertainty in the systems and funding that supports our youngest children, their families, and our communities, it is more critical than ever that BBF have the resources needed to carry out its charge to monitor the system and advise the governor and legislature. Without BBF's work, the state simply does not have the capacity to leverage the diverse perspectives, knowledge and data that is required to inform sound policy decisions. Not only does BBF gather and analyze copious amounts of quantitative and qualitative data, it convenes and facilitates conversations in order to analyze and understand how this data should inform policy decisions. Collectively, these efforts and BBF's unique coordinating and convening role in the early childhood system allow BBF to support accountability and technical assistance for legislative, community, and administrative partners.

In recent years, BBF's responsibilities and scope of work monitoring the early childhood system and public investments has expanded. In 2024 alone, BBF advised decision makers over 150 times on topics including Child Care Financial Assistance, Publicly Funded Pre-K, Special Accommodations Grants, Afterschool Programs, and housing. BBF supports accountability by providing technical assistance and supporting key leadership transitions by orienting new leaders to the complexities of the early childhood system. I am appealing to the legislature to support their request for an increased base allocation of \$322,444.50, to support this work.

Respectfully,

Flor Diaz Smith

