

Dear Senate and House Appropriations Committee Members:

My name is Staci Otis. I am an early childhood educator from Springfield and have operated my family child care home for almost 20 years. I am also a Universal Pre-K Program partner with our school district to further help the families in our town. Throughout my career, I have seen firsthand the financial strain that many families face when paying for child care. Many times, I have accepted reduced payments to help families in need, even when it meant sacrificing my own income to support them.

I am writing to strongly urge you to protect the funding allocated for child care in Vermont. The child care crisis in our state is far from over, despite the progress we've made. Act 76 has been an important step forward, allowing the state to strengthen the Child Care Financial Assistance Program by expanding eligibility and increasing payments to child care programs. Public investments have lowered costs for thousands of Vermonters and supported businesses by helping parents remain in the workforce. However, there are still many families who do not qualify for assistance, making it difficult for them to access quality care and to balance work and family life.

Reducing or reallocating funding now would not only undermine the progress we've made but also hurt the families and educators who depend on these investments. We cannot afford to turn back now. Vermont must continue to prioritize and fund its child care programs, ensuring that all families in Vermont can access affordable, high-quality care.

Please stand with our children, families, and early childhood educators by safeguarding the funding that has been so hard-earned. Let's continue to show the nation how Vermont leads by supporting both the families and the workforce that make our communities strong.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I trust that you will take the necessary steps to continue Vermont's progress in child care.

Sincerely,

Staci Otis