

Good afternoon Peter and Emily,

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2026/Workgroups/House%20Human%20Services/Bills/26-0802/Drafts,%20Amendments,%20and%20Legal%20Documents/W~Elizabeth%20St.%20James~DR%2026-0802,%20Draft%207.3,%203-27-2026~3-27-2026.pdf>

The House Human Services Committee has prepared legislative language for review and inclusion in the overall education reform bill of this session (see attached). In preparing this language, we took testimony from:

Fiscal Analyst, JFC
Deputy Fiscal Officer, JFC
Principal Fiscal Analyst, JFC
2 members of Legislative Counsel
Associate Executive Director, VSBA (on behalf of VSBA, VPA, VSA)
Executive Director, VSBA (on behalf of VSBA, VPA, VSA)
Chief Academic Officer, AOE
Secretary, AOE
Executive Director, Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
Deputy Commissioner, Child Development Division, DCF
Executive Director, First Children's Finance
Former Vice Chair of House Human Services
Executive Director, Building Bright Futures
Research and Data Director, Building Bright Futures
Data and Policy Manager, Building Bright Futures
Executive Director, Vermont Afterschool
Associate Director of Technical Assistance, National Institute for Early Education Research
Executive Director, Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children
Chair, Vermont Head Start Association

The Committee also reviewed recommendations from the PreK Implementation Committee report provided as a result of Act 76 (child care expansion).

During testimony, the Committee had access to recent data that shows Vermont's PreK system is generally working well. Key data points that reflect this success are:

- Vermont ranks 2nd in the country in access to PreK for 4-year-olds with 76% of eligible children receiving PreK; Vermont is one of only 2 states where more than 70% of 4-year-olds receive PreK (NIEER, BBF)
- Vermont is an outlier in providing PreK to 3-year-olds with 58% having access to PreK. The majority of other states provide little or no PreK to 3 year olds (NIEER)
- 91% of 4-year-olds meet literacy expectations (AOE, BBF)
- 85% of children arrive ready in kindergarten ready to learn (AOE, BBF)

Despite these positive outcomes, Vermont still has considerable work to do to actually ensure "universal" PreK in all 14 counties of the state. Access is not universal:

- Only 11% of PreK eligible children in Essex County are accessing PreK (BBF)
- There is considerable geographic disparity in the % of children with access to PreK from a high of 95% in Windsor and Windham Counties and 93% in Chittenden County to a low of 55% in Franklin County and 61% in Grand Isle County (First Children's Finance)
- The majority of states provide full school day (4+ hours) of PreK for 4-year-olds; less than 5% of Vermont PreK programs provide a full school day (NIEER)

Given these findings, the House Human Services Committee concentrated its work on:

- Continuing to support a mixed delivery system consisting of public and private PreK (of the states that provide PreK, all but 1 do so in a mixed delivery system - NIEER); the current provision of PreK is equally divided between public and private providers (50% each - BBF)
- Providing access to licensed teachers in the classroom in both the public and private systems, including access to support and provisional status
- Equalizing financial resources for private providers
- Assigning a locus of responsibility for ensuring access to PreK in school districts
- Gaining additional information to make better informed decisions on how to account for the expenses and payments for private and public PreK

And finally, the continuing issue of duplication in background checks for public providers is a currently unsolved issue. The Deputy Commissioner of the Child Development Division provided testimony indicating that an interagency workgroup including AOE, AHS and Public Safety is quite close to a potential solution to this issue. However, given the length of time this has persisted (over 10 years), the Committee considered the following language, but did not put it in the bill language: *Background checks. If the employees of a prekindergarten education program operated by a school district have completed a background check pursuant to section 255 of this title, the Department for Children and Families shall deem any requirement for a separate background check for the purpose of prequalification pursuant to this section to have been met.*

The House Human Services Committee very much appreciates the opportunity to provide our recommendations for PreK policy.

Theresa

Theresa A. M. Wood

Chair, House Human Services Committee
State Representative
Bolton, Buel's Gore, Huntington, Waterbury