

Dear Legislators:

I write today as a parent, an advocate for early childhood education, and a supporter of S.206, which would create individual licensure for early childhood educators. I serve on the boards of Northshire Day School in Manchester and the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children, and I'm also a parent to two young children. My career for more than 20 years is in financial services—an industry that is heavily regulated at both the state and federal levels. I would like to explain why professional regulation is just as important in early childhood education.

In my field, people want to know if their financial advisor is a fiduciary: someone who is legally bound to act in their best interest. This trust is built through clear qualifications, individual regulation, and accountability. Most professionals want to do right by their clients, but without regulation, there's no way to ensure consistency or remove those who aren't suited for the job.

I bring that perspective to early childhood education. Parents trust programs with their children. It's one of the most critical responsibilities in our society. But there is no individual regulatory system to ensure quality or accountability from the individual actually spending all day with your children. Many parents don't even realize this. Instead, we rely on word of mouth: "That program was pretty good 10 years ago when my kids went there." Well, I just have to hope and pray my children will be well cared for. In most cases they will be. But families deserve clear standards, transparency, and protection.

Child care is one of the biggest expenses families face, yet without the clarity of regulation, there's no simple way to measure the quality of what they're paying for. This lack of oversight is especially dangerous for families with limited options. Child care is a necessity, and without individual accountability, vulnerable families are left at risk.

I want to make another point tied to finances:

First, child care has been an underpaid field forever, and since it is now necessary for our economy, we treat it as a commodity instead of as a public good. So what happens when we reframe it as a public good?

The answer is high-quality early childhood education in any setting has a terrific return on investment. National studies show this, and I have firsthand data from Northshire Day School. Over a third of our children have special needs and receive early intervention. Thanks to qualified educators, many no longer need those services when they enter kindergarten. That reduces costs for taxpayers. I will add that as a nonprofit, we carry that burden alone. If all Vermont children had access to teachers with these qualifications, we could reduce public education and social service costs statewide.

Thank you for considering my thoughts. Regulating early childhood education protects families, ensures quality, and strengthens our workforce. Most importantly, it protects our children.

Sincerely,

Danny Sawtelle