

Dear Committee,

My name is Kelley Todriff, and I live in North Clarendon. I am the Children's Integrated Services Coordinator for the Rutland region, coordinating early intervention, family support, and prevention services for children from birth through age six. I have worked in early childhood education for over 30 years as a preschool teacher, a Head Start Family Services Manager, and a trained observer for the Pyramid Model. I support the bill because first, children need qualified teachers to thrive, and second, children can experience real harm when those caring for them don't understand their developmental needs.

Here is an example. To someone unfamiliar with child development, it may seem fine to ask three- and four-year-olds to sit quietly in a circle for thirty minutes. But it's not. Young children have short attention spans and need movement. Some will fidget, lie down, or talk. Others may get up and wander. If the person leading circle time does not understand this, and repeatedly tells children to sit still and be quiet, it escalates. Children sense stress. The focus shifts from learning to controlling behavior. The child is blamed.

When you take child development coursework, you learn that children absorb what they're hearing long before they can articulate. They hear when adults share negative comments about them. So at pickup, the parent of the child who ran during circle time hears, "Your child wouldn't listen today." I've observed classrooms where children hear over 50 negative directives in a short period. When children constantly hear "stop," "don't," and "no," it damages their self-esteem. They start to believe, "I must be bad."

You cannot rely on just anyone to care for children for eight hours a day without understanding what they are going through. Teaching today requires far more than it used to. Educators must understand child development, social-emotional learning, trauma, family communication. Without that foundation, children's needs go unrecognized, and opportunities for early intervention are lost. There is a critical window for early intervention. When we meet it, early intervention can be transformative, helping children reach the developmental milestones they need to succeed in kindergarten. When we miss it, it has long-term consequences.

Without individual licensure, it is a roll of the dice whether a child gets a well-prepared teacher or not. That is not fair. The lack of individual accountability in our system allows harmful practices to persist. If an educator is let go for poor practice, there is nothing to prevent them from being rehired elsewhere. Licensed programs cannot disclose termination reasons, so word of mouth is often the only safeguard. That is not a system that protects children.

Licensure ensures accountability. It means every early childhood educator, in every setting, teaching every age group, has the training they need before stepping into the classroom. They learn how to support children's development, build relationships, and recognize when a child needs additional help.

We must set a clear expectation that early childhood educators are professionals and are prepared, supported, and accountable. Our children deserve nothing less.

Thank you,

Kelley Todriff