

Dear Legislators,

I've run my family home early childhood program in Windsor since 1989, and I'm writing in support of S.206 and the early childhood educator profession. My journey in early childhood started when I was a high school student volunteering at a clinic in Woodstock and Windsor for children with severe physical and cognitive disabilities. That's when I realized this wasn't just something I enjoyed—it was my calling.

A few years later, after starting my own family, I couldn't find child care. So my husband and I decided I would open our home to care for other children. I began taking classes and I couldn't get enough. That thirst for knowledge led me to college, where I earned a Bachelor's in Human Relations and a Master's in Psychology, specializing in children and families.

I've spent my career learning the most up-to-date best practices while creating a space where children can grow into who they're meant to be.

I got involved in this professionalization effort back in 2018. When Rachel Hunter came to one of our network meetings talking about recognizing early childhood educators as professionals, no matter which early childhood setting we work in. My thoughts were finally, we were talking about being recognized for our training, experience and impact, not as babysitters or just "child care providers," but as educators. I was all in and volunteered to help spread the word.

I became an ambassador for the project. Ambassador wasn't a formal title, but a role in a grassroots, peer-to-peer outreach structure. I was well informed and empowered to share updates in our peer network meetings, listen to questions, and bring feedback to the educators on the task force.

I was also part of a cohort that looked at all of our experience and education and looked at whether we were already qualified for ECE I, II, or III, and what we would need to bridge our current credentials to the license we wanted. I worked closely on this with Tammie Hazlett, a family child care home owner from Thetford who was on the task force. We would meet and go over what we know, what we've done, what we could show for evidence that we have the skills. This was important and personal for me, I wanted to make sure that family home providers had a path for licensure even if they did not have a degree. Especially those who have been in the field as long as I have.

That's a piece I think people who are just hearing about this now, that they're missing. They're seeing requirements for an associate and bachelor's degrees and that's overwhelming. What people are missing is *that's for the future. It's not what's being asked of those of us already in the field.* We started looking at these bridges, these ways for educators to show what we know, based on doing our jobs and all the workshops and trainings and conferences that we've gone to. We can say, here are all the hours I've put in. Give me credit for what I know. I can do math, look at my budget. I can do writing comprehension, look at my family newsletter.

I've learned that this is part of the rulemaking process, (step 2) after the profession is formally created by the legislature, but what it points to is it's not going to be a harsh transition for our current workforce. For one thing, everyone who wants to get the family child care provider license, can get that license by the end of 2028 and renew it for the rest of their careers without having to get any other qualifications. So you can work in family child care and get grandfathered in to the system without having to do anything, or you can take it slowly and show what you know, or you can get on the college path, whatever works for you. But you are hearing some voices that have not been involved and don't know that we made these recommendations to help family child care. We need this recognition, so we built it to work for us.

I know there are voices asking where have family homes been in this process? Well, I've been involved for years, and I've been reaching out for years, and we still haven't reached everyone. We're going to be bringing people along this whole time. So, I say, welcome! Now is a great time to advocate for family child care in the rulemaking part of the process.

I started doing this as a so-called "babysitter" in 1989 and the difference between then and now is incredible. So I hope you'll pass S.206; and my fellow family childcare home educators, we have the great opportunity to keep shaping a process that works for us. I want everyone to think about how exciting it is that we can continue to lead ourselves in this process, because we know how to run our programs, we know what we know, and we want to do our very best for our children.

Thank you,
Sherry Boudro
Windsor