

Hello, my name is Stephanie Carvey. I am the Co-Executive Director of the Rutland County Parent Child Center, where I oversee all early childhood education programming at three sites serving infants through five-year-olds in Rutland County. I am also a seasoned early educator, endorsed by the Agency of Education to teach children from birth through sixth grade, and I have a master's degree in leadership studies from Vermont State University.

I strongly support the OPR's recommendations for licensing early childhood educators. The single most important factor in high-quality experiences for young children is the qualifications of the people working with them and their families. Elevating early childhood educators as professionals is key to ensuring the best outcomes for children, strengthening families, and securing Vermont's future.

COVID intensified the childcare crisis, highlighting our low wages and long hours, exposing the persistent misconception that this work is anything less than education, and proving that childcare is essential to business and our state economy. Not just anyone can do this specialized work, you really do need to be prepared. Over the last several years, Vermont has done a remarkable job putting supports in place for our workforce. Act 76 created stable funding to support families through increased childcare financial assistance, grow available childcare slots across the state, and support staff through compensation and other benefits. VTAEYC and system partners built pathways for educators to advance their qualifications with little to no student debt. Early childhood educators are already working towards higher credentials, and we're now in a much stronger position to increase individual qualifications through licensure.

As a program director with firsthand experience in hiring, supervising, and supporting staff to meet qualifications, I can attest that Vermont has already laid the foundational supports to help our workforce make the transition to licensure. Licensure won't harm the workforce, it will help it. It will attract and retain highly qualified, educated, and confident professionals who are ready to support families, young children, and future generations.

The clarity of licensure is critical. Workers need to see how their career can progress, and as an employer, I need to know how prepared my staff are when I hire them. I always encourage my staff to pursue credentials because there are now scholarships and grants to make education affordable, and more important, because that education makes them better at their jobs. Ultimately, it all comes back to doing what's best for children.

Licensure is the remaining piece of the system puzzle. The recommendations in S.206 are sound and I urge you to support the bill.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Carvey, Rutland