



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Re: S.206 – An act relating to licensure of early childhood educators by the Office of Professional Regulation

Dear Mr. Chair, Madam Vice Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Danielle Harris, and I am the Senior Director of Youth Development at the Greater Burlington YMCA. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of bringing greater clarity, consistency, and professional recognition to early childhood education in Vermont. The Y strongly supports recognizing our early childhood educators for the enormous responsibility they carry. They *are* professionals and they see themselves as nothing less.

Areas of Support

The Y supports several aspects of this bill, including the problems it seeks to solve and its overarching goals. We also appreciate the Health and Welfare amendments as we see these as improving the bill in several ways. Specifically, we support:

1. **Clarifying necessary credentials:** Explicit, well-defined expectations strengthen the field and ensure quality
2. **Improved verification systems:** Accessible, reliable systems for employers to verify candidate qualifications are essential for both program quality and efficient hiring

Current Workforce Reality

We must face a simple and immediate reality: Vermont needs more qualified early childhood educators in the field. Like many industries in the state, we face a critical workforce shortage, and we are concerned that aspects of this bill could unintentionally exasperate the challenge.

- **Risk of added barriers:** The Y is concerned that new requirements may create new barriers to entry at a time when recruitment and retention are already strained.
- **Current conditions:** Program directors talk to each other, compare notes. Many are operating at 80% capacity due to staffing shortages, turnover, and to allow teachers the bandwidth to better manage behaviors before risking serious burnout. We see experienced teachers leave the field altogether or pursue specialized roles that take them out of classrooms. Those who remain are carrying heavier workloads, which leads to burnout and further turnover. This is not a future concern. This is a daily reality for early education programs.
- **Economic impact:** Without teachers, programs close, and parents and guardians are left without a safe and enriching place for their child while they work or attend school



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Suggestion: Conduct an economic impact study that evaluates the current and anticipated number of professionals in the field and their anticipated longevity in the field, the current and anticipated number of children served vis-à-vis program capacity, an examination of minimum wages for all license levels that addresses the true cost of care, and an examination of the total cost for the system.

Pathways to Entry

Vermont already maintains strong regulatory standards for early childhood educators. It's why we lead the nation for kindergarten readiness. Adding new layers of requirements should build on this existing foundation without discouraging entry into the field.

We appreciate the clarity and simplicity of the ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III levels. Current regulations are difficult to understand and navigate, and this framework creates a clearer path for both professionals entering the field and for employers evaluating candidates. We particularly appreciate that the education qualifications for ECE II and ECE III are unchanged.

However, ECE I, the proposed entry level position in this bill, appears to require significantly more training – 120 hours of training and instruction versus the current 45 hours – before they can enter a classroom. To put this into context, 6 out of 14 assistant teachers in our early childhood programs would no longer qualify to work as an ECE I. While we support preparation for both practical and safety reasons, it is equally important to preserve accessible entry points into the profession. We continue to advocate for employees to gain experience in the classroom, as this leads to a better understanding of the field and greater retention. If the threshold to entry is set too high, the pipeline of new educators may shrink when expansion is needed.

Suggestion: Maintain the current level of training hours for ECE I and ensure as many pathways to entry as possible for all who are interested in joining this profession.

Employer Verification of Qualifications

As an employer, we appreciate how licensure has the potential to more easily verify candidate qualifications, as this is currently an onerous and time-intensive process. We would prefer to see a strengthening and streamlining of existing systems, such as BFIS, which we understand is undergoing updates. This could be more effective and efficient - for the employee and the employer - than introducing a new separate process.



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Suggestion: Examine the existing information technology, organizational assets, and personnel bandwidth currently in place at the state level to determine the feasibility of creating a centralized hub for employee documentation, credentials, training records, violations, etc.

Validating and Marketing the Profession

While we work to elevate the profession, we must ensure there is a clear and accessible pipeline into the field. Building stronger connections between early childhood programs and high schools, colleges, and universities, or through social service network that work with new Vermonters, could help create that pathway and address workforce shortages in a meaningful way.

When we have openings at the Y, we rely heavily on traditional job postings and informal networks. Given the importance of early education to our communities and the economy, and the level of public investment made in recent years, there should be a more intentional and visible pipeline connecting people to this profession and to programs on the ground.

Suggestion: Should we move forward with licensure, develop a formal framework that allows for greater coordination between the licensing body, educational centers, and early education programs so that classrooms remain fully staffed with high-quality teachers, that our youngest Vermonters receive the care they are entitled to, and our communities remain economically viable.

Final Note

We all share the goal of providing high-quality care and education for Vermont's children. We all support recognizing early childhood educators as the professionals that they are. However, we must achieve both quality and accessibility. Requirements and qualifications can only help the industry if they avoid reducing the workforce or create barrier to entering it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.