



Date: Tuesday, April 7, 2026  
To: House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs  
From: Emilie Tenenbaum, Executive Director, Let's Grow Kids Action Network  
Re: S.206 – Early Childhood Educator Profession Bill

---

Good afternoon. For the record, my name is Emilie Tenenbaum, and I'm the Executive Director of Let's Grow Kids Action Network. I am also a parent of 3 young children, the youngest is currently in child care in a Pre-K 4 classroom. Today, I am here to voice my support for S.206, the Early Childhood Educator Profession Bill. As a parent I want our early educators to have the support they need to thrive and I want to ensure more early educators enter the field so families across this state can access quality child care. In my role with LGKAN I can tell you the field needs this bill – and they have been asking for it, so let's make sure we pass it this session.

First, I'd like to provide some context and share where we are in terms of child care progress. We are in the second full year of implementation of Act 76, from which Vermont's child care system has received significant public investment. I'm happy to report, we are already seeing a tremendous return on that investment. More families can afford care, more programs are opening and expanding - especially in rural communities, some of which are seeing their first ever child care program open - and more Vermonters can participate in the workforce because child care is more accessible.

Currently, nearly **10,000 families** across the state are receiving child care financial assistance, with thousands more children benefiting from reduced costs. For many families, that has meant saving hundreds or even thousands of dollars each month. Vermont has also made progress on capacity: over the last two years, over **100 new programs have opened and we've added 1,200 spaces.**

We are also seeing growth in Vermont's early childhood workforce, which has increased by more than **8 percent, now totaling over 8,000 educators.** Additionally, there has also been a significant increase in the number of educators holding college degrees. Family child care homes are a critical part of that workforce—especially in rural communities—and their ability to grow and sustain their businesses is directly tied to this new investment and whether our state will continue to invest in this sector. It allows these small businesses to make decisions like adding a teacher or other supports that allow our educators

and kids to thrive. After years of decline, these programs are beginning to rebound which is very notable considering other places around the country are seeing a decline.

These are meaningful outcomes in a very short time that show Vermont's long-term approach to child care is working. The data is also clear about where we need to go next. A gap remains between available child care spaces and family needs, and programs across the state continue to report that they cannot expand because they cannot hire and retain enough educators.

**The early childhood workforce shortage is now the primary factor limiting access to child care in Vermont.** S.206 is a direct response to that challenge. Efforts to advance early childhood education as a profession have been underway in Vermont for nearly a decade, led by the workforce itself - early childhood educators have been asking for this! Between 2018 and 2022, over a thousand early childhood educators – from both family child care homes and child care centers - helped shape recommendations for a unified professional identity, qualifications, and licensure, with approval levels between 89 and 98 percent. As you heard, the Office of Professional Regulation conducted its own independent review and affirmed those recommendations. S.206 recently passed out of the Senate with bipartisan support, signaling strong agreement on the need for this workforce-informed solution.

Right now, professional requirements for early childhood education vary across settings, making it difficult for both educators and employers to understand what qualifications are needed for different roles and leaves parents unsure of the qualifications for the educator in the classrooms. S.206 creates a streamlined system with transparent and consistent expectations, allowing educators to move more easily between positions and to different programs, while giving programs the information they need to make the best hires. This bill is a necessary step to ensure this workforce continues to attract new talent, create jobs in our rural communities and retain the amazing early educators that are already doing this critical work.

There are questions about how changes like this impact the current workforce. From day one, the number one concern about increasing qualifications has been avoiding unintended consequences, such as driving people out of the field or causing program closures. This bill was designed with that in mind. It includes an eight-year, phased implementation timeline and creates pathways for current educators to meet new qualifications over time. The goal is to retain and strengthen the workforce, not shrink it. And I want to reiterate here, that the supports and timeline in the bill were designed and vetted by the early childhood workforce.

This bill is also about accountability. Vermont has made a significant public investment in child care, and with increased investment comes increased accountability. Licensure is a standard way to provide that accountability, ensuring that the people caring for and educating Vermont's youngest children meet clear, consistent qualifications across settings.

I know a lot of us are especially concerned about family child care home programs. I grew up in rural Vermont and spent my early years in family child care settings—my parents relied on that care to work and we were lucky enough to have some amazing programs where I had a good experience. In Vermont's rural communities, family child care homes are the backbone of the system: small businesses that are deeply rooted in their communities and often the only option for families. When child care is available, parents can work; when it's not, local businesses feel it immediately. Individual professional licensure creates a system where opportunities for family child care educators are the same as opportunities for center-based educators. At its core, this bill is about equal opportunity and resources for both educators and our youngest kids regardless of where they live. Strengthening the workforce through S.206 helps ensure that family child care homes in rural Vermont can continue to grow and serve their communities.

Concerns about the way the bill impacts rural communities were raised in the Senate. The bill was adjusted to make it even more clear in this area. The bill includes longer transitions for family child care providers and ensures credit for experience level to tailor the provisions for these concerns. I defer to OPR and Sharron Harrington with VTAEYC testifying in more detail in those areas. Sharron is the top expert representing voices from the field and I was glad you heard from her last week—but it was a compressed presentation because of time constraints, and I urge you to have her back before you wrap up work on the bill.

Long-term public investment is helping programs grow and improving the quality of early childhood education. But to meet the needs of families and Vermont businesses, we need more early childhood educators. Our continued progress depends on strengthening that workforce and ensuring we have a healthy pipeline of professionals excited to enter the field of early childhood education.

The best way to do that is to pass the Early Childhood Educator Profession Bill. By recognizing early childhood educators as the skilled professionals they are, creating clear career pathways, and aligning expectations across settings, this bill makes it possible to recruit and retain the workforce our child care system needs. Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions.