

TO: Matthew Birong and members of the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs

FROM: Dr. Kaitlin Northey, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education, University of Vermont

DATE: April 15, 2026

RE: S. 206, the “Early Childhood Educator Profession Bill”

Additional Materials:

Good morning, I’m Dr. Kaitlin Northey, and I’m an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Vermont. The views and statements I offer today are my own. They do not represent the positions or opinions of the University of Vermont or any of its offices, departments, or leadership.

I was invited to speak about the University of Vermont’s (UVM) Early Childhood program. In our state, four institutions of higher education (Champlain College, Saint Michael’s College, University of Vermont, Vermont State University) provide five Early Childhood Education bachelor’s degree programs. At the University of Vermont, our undergraduate Early Childhood majors earn a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood and, upon program completion and graduation, a recommendation for an Agency of Education teaching license for birth through third grade. Students at UVM can also major in Special Education and earn an Agency of Education teaching license for birth through age six Special Education.

I’m in favor of S. 206’s proposed system to license and regulate early childhood educators in child care and non-public settings. I believe S. 206 addresses important gaps in our current regulatory systems and I believe the bill will positively impact our state.

First, S. 206 recognizes and values the skills, competencies, and qualifications of the early childhood workforce.

- Supporting the learning and development of young children requires education and expertise, which is why Early Childhood Educators’ qualifications have consistently been identified as a key component of providing quality early childhood education and care opportunities for young children.
 - Drawing on decades of research (e.g., IOM & NRC, 2015), the early childhood field recommends Early Childhood Educators have a bachelor’s degree and specialized training in early childhood (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2024 see descriptions of quality benchmarks 3 and 4, pp. 30-31), as the combination of these two factors (i.e., bachelor’s degree *and* specialized early childhood training) produces stronger child outcomes than either factor separately (e.g., Bueno et al., 2010).
 - Research has demonstrated that there is a relationship between quality, child safety, and teacher turnover. For example, centers with high rates of safety violations, are more

likely to have high rates of teacher turnover, and lower quality with respect to supporting children's learning and development (e.g., Hall et al., 2026).

- S. 206 is an example of a policy that can influence all three of these factors (i.e., quality, child safety, teacher turnover).
- S. 206 will establish licensure categories that reflect the early childhood field's national standards and competencies (NAEYC, 2020), which are also used to guide the curricula and accreditation of higher education's Early Childhood preparation programs.
- By recognizing the education and expertise required to be an effective Early Childhood Educator, S. 206 will increase recognition and respect for Early Childhood Educators, which can incentivize educators to pursue or continue careers in child care (e.g., Fox et al., 2025).
 - Pre-service Early Childhood Educators want the public to recognize the expertise required to work in child care (Northey & Clark, 2025) and a licensure system that values their education is part of a professional system.
 - My UVM early childhood students are committed to the early childhood profession and are excited by Vermont's vision of the future! Public support and advocacy for Early Childhood Educators motivates many of our out-of-state Early Childhood majors to pursue careers in Vermont.
 - ECE III, in particular, is a licensure category that will be key to retaining Early Childhood Educators with an early childhood bachelor's degree in child care settings.

Second, S. 206's licensure categories will establish clear, easy-to-understand terminology to describe Early Childhood Educators' qualifications and competencies.

- Consistent terminology for Early Childhood Educators' qualifications (ECE I, II, and III) increases alignment and coherence across multiple systems, including within our state's early childhood workforce, the systems that support early childhood teacher preparation and career advancement, and early childhood systems nationally.
 - S. 206's competency-based licensure categories reflect the professional standards and competencies (NAEYC, 2020) and terminology used by national early childhood advocates (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020).
 - For more than five years, Vermont's early childhood higher education faculty and stakeholders have been using the national recommendations for ECE I, II, and III to improve alignment and articulation across our early childhood preparation programs' coursework, experiences, and supports (e.g., Northey & Titterton, 2023).
 - Alignment across state and national efforts, will make it easier for people to navigate education pathways, professional development opportunities, and career advancement in Vermont and other states.
- The proposed ECE I, II, and III licenses can serve as objective criteria higher education faculty can use to identify qualified mentor teachers to support students' field experiences (e.g., practicum placements, student teaching internships).
 - Field experiences are integral to teacher preparation as they provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to apply their learning in real classrooms under the supervision of effective mentor teachers (NAEYC, 2020). However, inconsistent expectations for

Early Childhood Educators' qualifications in child care settings has made it challenging for preparation programs to identify mentor teachers with the competencies needed for quality field experiences.

- Inexperienced and under-qualified mentor teachers can negatively impact early childhood teachers' preparation and perceptions of the field, such as instances when pre-service teachers have more years of experience working with young children and/or more EC coursework than their assigned mentor teachers (Northey & Clark, 2025).
- When students do field experiences in public school settings (e.g., for their kindergarten through third grade practica, prekindergarten through third grade internship) their mentor teachers have AoE teaching licenses with appropriate endorsements.
- Clear and consistent terminology will recognize the qualifications of our current EC workforce and allow teacher preparation programs to easily identify qualified mentor teachers in child care settings for the infant, toddler, and preschool field experiences that are pivotal to their preparation, supporting the development and learning of our future early childhood workforce.
- Proposed licensure categories can be understood by the public (e.g., parents, caregivers, intervention specialists, researchers) and are likely to be useful to those outside of child care, as well, when making informed hiring decisions (e.g., parent hiring a nanny, objective criteria for hiring assistant teachers or paraprofessionals in public schools).

Third, S. 206 recognizes and values early childhood education and the collective power of the early childhood workforce in Vermont.

- Our public investments, especially those that support the education of our current workforce and pre-service teachers, are working!
 - Vermont's Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division (2026) recently reported a 22.4% increase from 2022 in the number of individuals working in regulated early childhood education and afterschool programs who have earned an associate degree or higher.
 - Full-time Early Childhood Educators who participated in focus groups for my study on students' experiences in early childhood teacher preparation programs described how public investments in their education helped them feel "recognized, valued, and respected by policymakers and the public" (Northey & Couzo, 2025, p. 19).
 - Anecdotally, I can report that Student Loan Repayment Assistance Programs for Early Childhood Educators did help incentivize a few of our graduates (each with a bachelor's degree and AoE teaching license) to work in child care settings after graduation.
- Increased visibility and advocacy for early childhood education in Vermont has increased general interest in early childhood.
 - In fall 2024, UVM launched an interdisciplinary Childhood Studies minor because we noticed that undergraduate students were interested in learning more about early childhood, even if they weren't planning to be educators. Within the first year it

enrolled 46 students and it currently has more than 105 students from a wide variety of majors.

- S. 206 reflects the voices of Vermont’s Early Childhood Educators and its proposal to establish a professional board of licensees to develop and oversee regulation of the profession honors the capacity and vision of the workforce.
 - Vermont’s current and future Early Childhood Educators are advocates and agents of change who are actively engaged and invested in shaping the professional identity of our field.

Before I conclude, I want to share the words of two recent UVM alumni who are currently working in child care settings in Vermont. I reached out yesterday asking if they had any insights about the bill. I find their words powerful reminders for the promise they see in this proposed legislation and their hopes for the future of our Early Childhood system.

- “I think this bill would help give [the teachers I work with] the recognition they deserve for the amazing work they already do everyday...I’m so excited that this bill is being considered ...because I really would like to build my career in this field, and I know the teachers I work with feel the same.”
- “I have been keeping a close eye on this bill as it means a tremendous amount to the field....Although at [my center] I am in good company of some other licensed educators, it is certainly not every lead staff. At the two other centers I worked at during college, the majority of my colleagues had limited formal ECE preparation. Multiple times, I was the most prepared individual in the classroom, despite only having a couple semesters under my belt. A large reason why I chose [this center] was because of the higher number of well-prepared educators. This is because it can feel like an uphill battle to be teaching in a setting where you have adequate preparation but the people around you do not.”

These graduates, who both have AoE teaching licenses for birth through third grade, chose to stay in Vermont after graduation and to work in child care centers. They specifically chose centers that employ Early Childhood Educators with strong training and preparation.

In conclusion, I believe S. 206 will strengthen and increase the quality of our state’s birth through 21 education system and positively impact the preparation, respect, and recognition of Early Childhood Educators, who are essential to supporting positive outcomes and benefits for children, families, society and our state.

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Vermont Higher Ed Programs offering a Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Education

University of Vermont	Vermont State University ECE Online	Vermont State University Castleton Campus	Champlain College	Saint Michael's College
Degree Type: BS 4-year degree or 2+2 pathway with CCV	Degree Type: BS 2+2 pathway with CCV	Degree Type: BA 4-year degree	Degree Type: BS 4-year degree	Degree Type: BA 4-year degree
Course Type: In-person	Course Type: Online	Course Type: In-person	Course Type: In-person	Course Type: In-person
Transfer agreement: 2 + 2 pathway	Transfer agreement: 2 + 2 pathway	Transfer agreement: Vermont Transfer Guarantee	Transfer agreement: Vermont Transfer Guarantee	
AOE Endorsement: ECE 0-PreK/K-3	AOE Endorsement: ECE 0-PreK	AOE Endorsement: ECE 0-PreK/K-3 ECSE 0-6	AOE Endorsement: ECE 0-PreK ECE K-3 ECE 0-PreK/K-3	AOE Endorsement: Concentration / add on ECE 0-PreK
Qualifications: Level IVB/ECE III	Qualifications: Level IVB/ECE III	Qualifications: Level IVB/ECE III	Qualifications: Level IVB/ECE III	Qualifications: Level IVB/ECE III
Additional: ECE minor / certificate options BS Special Education option with age 0-6 focus				

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