

Testimony Comments Submitted to: House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs

Submitted By: Dr. Leslie C. Johnson, Associate Academic Dean of Behavioral Science and Education, Community College of Vermont

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

Date: April 10, 2026

My name is Dr. Leslie Johnson. I am Associate Academic Dean of Behavioral Science and Education at the Community College of Vermont (CCV). As part of my role at CCV, I provide leadership and direction for the college's Early Childhood Education curriculum, oversee the faculty who teach early childhood education courses, and provide supervision for the Northern Lights at CCV team. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as related to S.206.

Serving Vermont's early childhood educators has remained an important part of CCV's work since the early 1970s. Today, CCV is Vermont's second largest institution of higher education, with over 10,000 students enrolled each year. Early Childhood Education is among the most popular curricular areas at the College. In the 2024-2025 academic year, we served 712 students in our Early Childhood Education programs. CCV students live rich and complex lives. The average age of our students is 26 years old, with 90% of degree students attending part-time and 74% working full- or part-time jobs. In Early Childhood Education, students attend CCV at all points in their lives, from secondary education students just beginning their careers to people with decades of experience working with children and families. Honoring this diversity, we work hard to provide high-quality, accessible, opportunities that support students. This approach includes in-person and online learning, robust academic, career development, and student support services, and affordable tuition with scholarships and grants opportunities resulting in many students attending at low cost or no cost to them.

CCV offers three certificates in early childhood education—the Childcare Certificate, the Early Childhood Education Administrator Certificate, and the Afterschool and Youth Work Certificate—that stack seamlessly into our Early Childhood Education Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree. Our courses, certificates, and degree program are aligned with the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) professional standards and competencies and create a pathway that prepares students at the ECE I and ECE II levels. In the Early Childhood Education Associate of Arts degree, students develop competency in the areas of child development, family and community, teaching and learning, health and safety, professionalism, and program organization. Associate degree students also complete CCV's 33-credit General Education curriculum, which supports students' development of skills in areas such as written expression, quantitative reasoning, digital and computing literacy, the arts, and natural sciences. Students benefit from significant choice and flexibility in their general education coursework, allowing them agency to choose courses that benefit their career goals. For example, a student might choose to take Introduction to Environmental Science as part of their

development of a nature-based approach to curriculum. Our certificates are 24 credit credentials that prepare students with foundational knowledge and experiences to support their work with children and families. These certificates are designed to provide a bridge to continued learning at the associate degree level by encouraging momentum and academic success. Upon completion of the associate degree, CCV students may choose to continue their education by leveraging our articulation agreements that offer transfer pathways to a range of bachelor's degree programs in Vermont and the Northeast.

CCV recognizes that many early childhood educators have gained rich college-level learning from their experiences working with children and families. We support students to gain credit for prior learning and professional experience through the Vermont State Colleges Office of Prior Learning Assessment. In the Office of Prior Learning Assessment, we help non-traditional learners describe and document their learning for college credit. There are multiple pathways for students to gain credit for prior learning including credit by examination, individual course challenges, and portfolio courses where students work with a faculty member to document their learning for multiple academic courses. Prior Learning Assessment is a popular option for early childhood educators, with students who have experience of at least one year in the field demonstrating great success. In addition, there are multiple scholarships and grants available to support early childhood education students through these programs. Since 2017, early childhood educators have accounted for approximately 50% of the students we serve in the program. The most frequently accessed option for early childhood educators is course challenge/competency-based pathways, where they see a success rate of more than 97%. In portfolio courses, early childhood educators see a credit award rate equal to other professions: 12.6-credit average in Focused Portfolio Development and 30-credit average in Assessment of Prior Learning. Since 2020, nearly 150 early childhood educators have received 2,811 college credits from portfolio courses. These awards resulted in an average of \$5,000 in tuition savings and 250 hours of time saved per student.

We also recognize that current and aspiring professionals need guidance navigating professional requirements. CCV supports the career and professional development of early childhood educators through our program Northern Lights at CCV. This program, which is funded by the Child Development Division of Vermont's Department for Children and Families, operates as the hub of the professional development system for Vermont's Early Childhood and Afterschool Workforce. Northern Lights provides professional development trainings and communities of practice, individualized career advising, and support for the State's workforce registry. The Northern Lights Resource Advisors, who offer career advising to all professionals in Vermont's early childhood and afterschool workforce, have deep knowledge of and experience in Vermont's systems. In 2025 alone, they provided over 1,800 career advising consultations to professionals working in the field.

At the heart of the mission of the Community College of Vermont is a belief that education is a powerful mechanism for opening up possibilities and changing lives. At CCV, we are committed to supporting Vermont's early childhood education workforce and to helping our students meet the current or future education and professional development requirements to work in Vermont's early education settings.