

Date: April 10, 2026

To: Members of the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs

From: Sharron Harrington, Executive Director, Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC)

Re: S.206, the "Early Childhood Educator Profession Bill"

Additional Materials:

[S.206 VTAEYC Testimony Slides](#)

Memo: S.206: The ECE Profession Bill Strengthens Vermont's Early Childhood Educator Workforce (attached separately)

1. Introduction

Good afternoon. **For the record I am Sharron Harrington**, Executive Director of the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC).

2. Workforce Leadership in Shaping S.206

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on S.206. VTAEYC fully supports this legislation because it strengthens our early childhood educator workforce, and because this is what the workforce itself has asked for and helped design.

If we are serious about growing our workforce, we should start by listening to the people doing the work.

We are the state's largest membership organization for early childhood educators, and our role is to elevate their voices. This bill reflects those voices.

To start, we all agree Vermont is expensive. Vermont needs to welcome business, and Vermont needs to welcome families. Both of these rely on child care. That's why we need a bill that protects and grows our early childhood education workforce. This bill is a solution to issues we all agree on.

This all started 10 years ago when Vermont early childhood educators got together to figure out how to save this workforce. Educators were leaving the field because career pathways weren't clear, coursework didn't lead to degrees, and qualification requirements weren't consistent. Over the next decade, VTAEYC housed a workforce-led effort to protect and grow our early childhood educator workforce for the future of our state, and our children and families. The way through, they determined and OPR agreed, is professional recognition through licensure.

3. National Context

Vermont is regarded as a leader by our national colleagues because we have ensured our workforce is centered in shaping policies that impact them.

To be clear, this work in Vermont is happening in parallel to work that's happening nationally. The framework for this bill comes from recommendations from the [Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education](#).

Other states have made major strides toward advancing the Commission's recommendations. States now considering investing in child care are asking for Vermont's playbook on workforce engagement. Recently several states, including New York and Delaware, have met with us to inform them of their next steps.

As Vermont made historic investments through Act 76, the workforce was designing what accountability and professional standards should look like. Between 2018 and 2022, more than 1,000 Vermont early childhood educators helped design this framework, with 89–98% support across key components. This level of workforce alignment is rare, and it is why Vermont is being looked to nationally as a model

4. History of Workforce Engagement

This bill is the result of years of direct workforce engagement. Early childhood educators, the people doing the work every day, shaped how they would be accountable for that investment.

Our workforce engagement was so thorough that the Office of Professional Regulation not only agreed that licensure was necessary to protect public safety, but they adopted our workforce's recommendations almost completely in their Sunrise Report to the Legislature, which is what prompted S.206.

So when I say workforce engagement, I mean that this is not top-down regulation. This is bottom-up design.

Since Act 76, the regulated child care workforce has increased by 8.5%, and the number of educators with a degree has grown by over 22%. **That tells us something important: when we invest and create pathways, this workforce responds.**

Our early childhood educators want to be their best, and they want this bill.

5. Who S.206 Impacts and Where They Work

S.206 proposes to license early childhood educators working in home- and center-based child care programs regulated by the Child Development Division of the Department for Children and Families (CDD).

This bill is focused on the regulated workforce already entrusted with Vermont's youngest children.

This bill is especially important for family child care educators, because the current system makes it harder—not easier—for small businesses to grow. Licensure creates clearer, more flexible pathways.

There are workforce members not impacted by this bill, including public school educators, afterschool-only educators, and unregulated caregivers such as parents, relatives, and nannies.

This bill also does not impact unregulated caregivers: parents, grandparents, nannies, au pairs, people caring for one or two other families' children.

Early childhood is already a complicated system, involving multiple agencies.

Let me say this directly: no one in this field is asking for more regulation for its own sake. We are asking for the right regulation, because the current system is fragmented, confusing, and inefficient.

S.206 creates individual licensure and a governing board of early childhood educators with expertise specific to this field.

This is about simplifying the system over time, not adding complexity.

6. Why A License to Practice: Clear Career Pathways

Licensure strengthens the workforce we need to recruit and retain by creating clear expectations, shared standards, and professional recognition.

The current system is complicated, with multiple titles and unclear requirements. Hiring directors struggle to understand if applicants are qualified to do the jobs they're applying for.

That confusion is not neutral. It drives people out of the field.

Licensure creates clarity, improves mobility across settings, and supports fairer compensation. When vocations become professions, their workforces get stronger and better qualified, and the public understands their qualifications. For example if you walk into any setting where nurses work—hospital, primary care, assisted care facility, summer camp—and you see RN or LPN on a name tag, you trust that person's qualifications.

Every other essential workforce clearly ties qualifications to scope of practice and accountability. Early childhood educators should not be the exception.

7. Current Workforce: Meeting Rural Communities' Needs—Vickie Gratton

We have seen what happens when educators have access to clear pathways and support.

Vickie Gratton is an early childhood educator in Franklin County who started by taking care of neighbor children, then opened a registered home program, and realized this was her calling.

VTAEYC administers TEACH Early Childhood® Vermont, a scholarship program that helps educators earn degrees while they continue working in the field. Vickie was one of those educators.

As she put it: “TEACH made my dream possible. The longer I take classes, the more I want to learn to provide children with a safe, loving, and positive learning environment.”

Here's what that looked like in her community:

Vickie and Michelle Marchant-Sheldon, who also ran a home program, leveraged their qualifications and access to grants and resources to open Swanton's first child care center, Spark Academy—**tripling local child care capacity and creating new early childhood educator jobs.**

Six months later, they opened Baby Spark, an infant and toddler center, to serve even more families in Franklin County.

That kind of growth should not be the exception. Right now, the system makes that path harder than it should be, because our system has lower expectations for family child care than center-based care, and we have under-resourced those educators. We aim to correct that with this bill. Like family child care educator Chris Nelson says, “Quality does not depend on the door you walk into.”

Vickie is a driven person who took advantage of resources to grow and meet her rural community's needs. Licensure makes what she did accessible, so more educators can grow their programs, respond to community needs, and strengthen Vermont's child care system.

8. Future Workforce: “If You Build It, They Will Come”—Youth Apprenticeship

Our future workforce is young Vermonters. We want to keep them here. They're excited to join a recognized profession, and they're earning qualifications right now.

Growing our early childhood educator workforce has been on our Legislature's mind for a long time — the COVID shutdown made it clear to everyone how essential this workforce is to our state's overall workforce, business health, and economy. So, the Legislature had the good idea to fund a pilot program, that is now a flourishing Youth Apprenticeship for students in some career and technical education centers interested in early childhood education as a career.

This program has more than tripled since its pilot year in 2020-2021. Youth Apprentices get paid work experience in community child care programs and graduate high school with transferable college credits. They're well on their way to a career in ECE. Three-quarters of last year's Youth Apprenticeship class received summer or permanent job offers from their sponsor programs. Programs love having a feeder program where they can recruit and train their own future staff.

Youth Apprenticeship and other pathways are growing and connecting people to this field.

A former Youth Apprentice, Alora Zargo, is now a freshman at UVM. Last year, her senior year of high school, she testified: "I'm graduating high school qualified for ECE I licensure. Licensure creates a pathway for students like me to envision a lifelong career in early childhood education."

The future workforce is there. Youth Apprenticeship is just one pathway in. **When we invest and create pathways, people enter and stay. If you build a profession, people join it.**

9. Why a License to Practice: Accountability and Public Investment

Let's be clear: this bill does not raise taxes. Public investment has already been made through Act 76.

But public investment requires public accountability. Licensure provides that accountability.

For our workforce, increasing qualifications does have costs. That's why there are strong financial supports already in place. **We are not asking educators to do more without support: we built the supports first.** Remember, educators shaped the recommendations for how this would work. They recommended an extended implementation timeline, and resources to help educators meet requirements. These resources already exist.

Many program directors already plan to cover the cost of licensing fees for their educators, because having a qualified, stable workforce is so important to them. As you heard from Jen Olson in her testimony, it reduces their administrative burden when hiring.

The workforce is already moving in this direction. The question is whether we support them.

Vermont businesses depend on a stable child care system, and that system depends on a stable workforce. This bill is about protecting that workforce, and by extension, the state's economy.

I myself am a career changer, who went through Community College of Vermont's Prior Learning Assessment process, and became a first-generation college graduate. The critical piece is support to overcome obstacles: financial, time, fear of not belonging. That's where Vermont has excelled, investing in resources and building pathways, putting a strong emphasis on mentoring. A 22% increase in individuals with degrees is clear evidence it's working.

People want to join this workforce, and they want to be well-prepared to do this work. Every early childhood educator who enters or continues in the field, thanks to access to these preparation programs, means a classroom or program is opening or staying open.

14. Why a License to Practice: Increased Qualifications Lead to Improved Child Outcomes

There are many reasons to support this bill. **The most important is simple: it is better for children.**

[Research shows](#) that higher-qualified educators lead to better outcomes for children, and those outcomes have long-term impacts on education, health, and economic stability. This means children are less likely to need special services, are more likely to graduate high school, less likely to be incarcerated, more likely to own a home, have savings, raise their own children, and experience better health.

This is not just a workforce policy. It is an economic policy.

The quality of your child's early experiences depends on the person who is teaching and caring for your child all day. Their qualifications matter.

15. Supports Increase Qualifications

Early childhood educators know this. [Recent data prove](#) that when we build the supports, early childhood educators increase their qualifications. Last year:

- 836 early childhood educators received grants and bonuses for increasing qualifications. That's 30% more than the previous year.
- Of 135 TEACH Early Childhood Vermont scholarship recipients, half were first-generation college students. Scholars represented every child care role and setting, and all 14 Vermont counties.
- Vermont TEACH scholars reported earning almost 15% higher wages after earning their associate degree, and over 17% more after earning their bachelor's degree.

15. VTAEYC Supports S.206 - Thank You

Individual licensure strengthens workforce stability, increases capacity, and improves access for families.

Let me end where I began: the workforce is asking for this. Let's listen to them. They are asking for clear standards, professional recognition, and a system that will grow and strengthen this field.

Individual licensure strengthens workforce commitment and stabilizes staffing. That increases capacity and helps programs serve more children and families. This means families can work, fully trusting the quality of their children's experiences, and children arrive at kindergarten with the skills they need to learn.

We urge you to support S.206 because when the people doing the work tell you what they need, the strongest policy response is to listen. Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome your questions.