

Dear Legislators,

I'm writing in support of requiring a license for early childhood educators. I'm a single parent of a four year old son. I currently work as a massage therapist, and I spent 10 years working as a nurse, including as an ER nurse during Covid. So in a medical setting, I know what to expect, what questions to ask, I know what quality patient care looks like, and I know patients have the right to transparency.

Navigating child care was totally different. I assumed that you had to meet standards to care for children. I didn't realize that some educators did and some didn't have knowledge to keep my child physically and emotionally safe and supported. I didn't realize there's no way for me as a parent to actually learn the qualifications of the person caring for my child.

My son has asthma, and he's hearing impaired, which led to a speech delay. It was hard for him to articulate what he needed. I changed jobs to one that would allow me to work remotely, and found a program with an outdoor curriculum that looked like a great fit. Then, my son suffered a leg injury that left him temporarily unable to walk. I communicated with this program, postponed his enrollment, and worked full time from home with no childcare, all summer. Once he was medically cleared, I let the program know. He started two weeks later, and I went to the office.

But then I picked him up at the end of the day, and it was a heat advisory day. He was sitting alone outside, and remember he has asthma. He said, "Mommy, let's go."

They said he couldn't keep up. I looked at the outdoor area, which had ample room for a stroller or other accommodation. When I asked by email to see their policies and procedures for making physical accommodations, they avoided answering. There was no collaboration with me, and there was no effort to include my son, despite ample time to develop a temporary accommodation plan together. We did not feel welcome.

So, I was back at home with no child care, working full time remotely, by myself.

Then I got him into Head Start. It was a 180 degree experience from the one I'd had. They had the skills and confidence to support him, and brought me in as a partner. They said, "We're going to sign him up for PT and speech therapy!" They made sure he was connecting with other children, and reassured me. They ensure we have what we need, and connect us to resources.

The other program said "we need to wait for him to be stronger before we can include him." His current educators actively take steps to include him and help him participate. They treat us like family.

The issue is, I don't think the other program's educators realized that excluding him was problematic. If I had known about early childhood educator qualifications, I could have asked different questions, but I was navigating a system for the first time, alone, and quickly. There's

so much trust involved. I didn't think that he would not be okay. I didn't think I would need to ask my young child's educators, "Do you have the background and preparation to do this job?"

Head Start has qualification requirements, so I know his current educators are well-prepared. And he loves going to child care now, and that supports me, too.

Sincerely,
Hannah Holt
Bennington