



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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

Dear Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Danielle Harris, and I am the Senior Director of Youth Development at the Greater Burlington YMCA. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of bringing greater clarity, consistency, and professional recognition to early childhood education in Vermont. The Y strongly supports recognizing our early childhood educators for the enormous responsibility they carry. They *are* professionals and they see themselves as nothing less.

The Y supports several aspects of this bill, including the problems it seeks to solve and its overarching goals. We also appreciate the Health and Welfare amendments as we see these as improving the bill in several ways.

We support clarifying the credentials necessary to be in the classroom, as outlined in this bill. Clear expectations help strengthen the field and ensure quality for children and families. In addition, we support the development of a mechanism that makes it easier for employers to verify whether a candidate is qualified to be in a classroom. Having accessible, reliable systems for credential verification is essential for both program quality and efficient hiring.

At the same time, it's imperative that we face a simple reality: we need more qualified educators in the field. We are concerned that this bill may unintentionally create additional barriers to entry at a time when recruitment and retention are already significant challenges.

My testimony today focuses on the workforce. Like many industries across the state, we are facing a workforce shortage, and we share the goal of increasing the number of qualified workers in the field. We also recognize our role in the broader economy: without teachers in classrooms, programs go offline, and parents and guardians are left without a safe and enriching place for their child while they work or attend school.

On the ground, this challenge is immediate and visible. Program Directors in Early Childhood Education programs talk to each other, compare notes. We've learned that many programs – ours included – are currently operating at roughly 80% of enrollment capacity. This means spots that could serve children and families remain unavailable. This reduced capacity is for a variety of reasons, like staffing shortages and turnover overall. It's also a fact that leaving space in the classroom gives teachers the bandwidth to better deal with the increase in behaviors they must handle before risking serious burnout. We see experienced teachers leave the field altogether or pursue specialized roles that take them out of classrooms. At the same time, those who



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remain are carrying heavier workloads, leading to burnout and can lead to further turnover. This is not a future concern. This is the daily reality for early education programs.

Workforce Qualifications

Vermont already has established regulations and high-quality standards in place for early childhood educators. It's why we lead the nation for kindergarten readiness. Adding new layers of requirements risks discouraging individuals interested in entering the field and could result in fewer people entering the field overall.

We appreciate the clarity and simplicity of the ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III levels. Current regulations are difficult to understand and navigate, and this framework creates a clearer path for both professionals entering the field and for employers evaluating candidates. For ECE II and ECE III, the educational qualifications needed to meet these criteria are unchanged, which is positive.

ECE I, the proposed entry level position in this bill, appears to require significantly more training before they can enter a classroom. While we support preparation for both practical and safety reasons, we need to be careful not to unintentionally limit entry-level access. If the threshold to enter is too high, we risk shrinking the very pipeline we're trying to grow. We continue to advocate for employees to gain experience in the classroom as this leads to a better understanding of the field and greater retention.

Employer Verification of Qualifications

As an employer, we appreciate the proposed framework to more easily verify candidate qualifications. However, we think this can be achieved without creating a licensing board. Existing systems, such as BFIS, which we understand is undergoing updates, could be further leveraged as part of the solution. For example, could BFIS serve as a centralized hub for documentation, credentials, and even tracking violations or infractions? Strengthening and streamlining existing systems may be more effective than introducing new processes.

Validating and Marketing the Profession

Finally, while we work to elevate the profession, we must ensure there is a clear and accessible pipeline into the field. Building stronger connections between early childhood programs and high schools, colleges, and universities could help create that pathway and address workforce shortages in a meaningful way.



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When we have openings at the Y, we rely heavily on traditional job postings and informal networks. Given the importance of early education to our communities and the economy, and the level of public investment made in recent years, there should be a more intentional and visible pipeline connecting people to this profession and to programs on the ground.

We all share the goal of providing high-quality care and education for Vermont's children. We all support recognizing early childhood educators as the professionals that they are. However, we must achieve both quality and accessibility. Requirements and qualifications can only help the industry if they avoid reducing the workforce or create barrier to entering it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.