

Good morning everyone. For the record, I am Shannon Edmonds-Folsom, the Child Care Manager for Jay Peak Resort.

In licensing terms, I am the program director of our licensed center based child care and preschool program, which also offers non-recurring services. Our program, Jay Peak Child Care, exists in a unique space insofar that it is a private for-profit business operated by Jay Peak Resort, but benefits from CCFAP funding and UPK Act 166 funding, which comes from DCF and the public school system respectively. I am also the AOE licensed teacher for our Universal PreK program with a Birth through PreK endorsement. This means that I split my time between administrative side of the department, and also still spend time directly in the classroom with children. I support S.206, testified my support for the bill at the Senate Committee for Health and Welfare back in January, and testified again for the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs yesterday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Here are my reasons for supporting S.206:

- Provides a clear pathway to attract and retain new members to the ECE field
  - If new recruits are presented with a clear career path with respect and fair pay, the whole field benefits from attracting qualified and energetic candidates.
- Provides further accountability for ECE professionals, which generates trust and security for the families we serve
  - There is not necessarily a lot of transparency or common public knowledge around qualifications for current ECEs. The licensing regulations differentiating a teacher associate from a teacher assistant to an aide to a substitute is easy for me to understand, but it's literally my job to do so. Explaining licensing requirements for staff credentialing is currently lengthy and convoluted. Offering a clear license structure of I, II, or III streamlines this. Furthermore, the general public already has an accepted understanding of a license as permission to practice, whether it's medical, commercial, etc.
  - Having trust and transparency with families can only serve to benefit all centers, whether they are for-profit like mine, non-profit, home providers, or otherwise. Families that trust the system enroll their children, and when centers fill their slots, we make money.
  - Unfortunately, there is not currently a consistent way to track a candidate's work performance if they move from center to center. Violations on a center's license to operate are public record, but when directors are hiring staff, we rely on the fingerprint background check and personally calling references. If there is a teacher with a problematic history or questionable work performance, there's not a clear cut way to identify that. This could result in poorer performing teachers bouncing from program to program with little accountability. As a director, it's infuriating. As a parent, it's potentially scary enough to keep your kids home.
- Provides a clearer structure for employers to advocate for, or incentivize better compensation for ECEs

- Since our center operates through Jay Peak Resort, I am not fully in control of compensation for my staff. That said, with the passage of S.206, it would give me clearer grounds to continue advocating on their behalf to make fair wages for the valuable work they do.
- Offers hiring managers a clearer sense of qualifications and professional commitment to the ECE field when recruiting staff
- As far as I understand, there is still a transition time built in to last over several years to allow existing providers to gain licensure, while also providing inroads for new recruitment directly into the new system. There is also room for, and a need for, current providers to offer their knowledge and experience and bridge the best parts of our current practices to this new path forward.
  - In general, the resistance I've encountered to S.206 is rooted in fear of change. There is also valid frustration from established educators and family home providers that they may feel "locked out" of a new licensure system if they have decided they do not want to return to college. However, there are opportunities for currently operating programs to be "grandfathered" in so there is no disruption in service, and there are a myriad of supports for helping guide folks either back to school or through it for the first time. VTAEYC is the best resource for more details on that point. To put it briefly, though, our current system is fragile, fragmented, and still fighting for the professional recognition it deserves. Abandoning licensure "because things are working fine the way they are" is not an acceptable reason to delay progress, or deny a better future for ECEs that wish to enter the field in the next 10, 20, 30 years. ECE professionals now have the opportunity and responsibility to leave this career field better than we found it.
- Finally, S.206 provides an opportunity to further the conversation about the false divide between "care" and "education" and destigmatize the ECE field as "less than" the public education system.
  - For example, it was proposed that there could be confusion between licenses for public educators and the proposed ECE licenses. A specific argument was made to drop ECE III because it was too closely aligned with current expectations for an AOE teaching license with a PreK or PreK Special Ed endorsement. However, I currently have my AOE PreK teaching license so I can offer UPK through my program, and families I serve can benefit from tuition assistance through Act 166. But, what if I wanted to use my Master's Degree in Early Ed to pursue ECE III as an infant teacher? A toddler teacher? Infant and toddler teachers are required to undergo the same amount of education and professional development as their PreK peers. Does their wish to pursue a career as an infant or toddler teacher degrade that experience because "they're just taking care of babies"? Here's another question I could ask: Did you know the United States already has federally subsidized, nationally available child care? It's called the public school system. And that would enrage some people because they genuinely worked hard for their teaching licenses and for their professional respect. So why, I ask you, is it any different for

hardworking professionals that are incredible infant and toddler teachers? As someone who hires in this field, do you know how hard it is to find those people? Spoiler alert, it's hard. Really hard.

In conclusion, I support S. 206 because it is an opportunity to take an actionable step towards stabilizing the early childhood education career field. Further, it is real systemic change that reflects Vermont's evolving values in prioritizing accessible high quality care and education for children and families. Thank you all for your time and consideration, and I'd like to offer any remaining time for answering any questions from the committee.