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To: Members of the House Committee on Human Services

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

Susan Titterton, Project Coordinator, Advancing ECE as a Profession, VTAEYC

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

Additional Materials:

[S.206 VTAEYC Testimony Slides](#)

[TEACH 2025 Impact Report](#)

[Op-ed: Vermont Depends on Family Child Care \(Nelson et al\)](#)

1. Introduction

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

This committee is well grounded in early childhood education and understands its complexity. My goal today is to clearly outline what this bill does, who it applies to, and why the workforce is asking for it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on S.206. VTAEYC is a non-profit organization that is the largest membership and advocacy organization for early childhood educators in the state, and we are the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), one of the country’s leading early childhood education organizations. As a national organization, NAEYC’s key role is to promote high-quality early learning for each and every child, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. In Vermont, VTAEYC works to advance equity and excellence in early childhood education. Our organization’s vision is that Vermont’s children thrive and realize their true promise in supportive communities.

We partner with the Child Development Division to administer a broad range of programs and services for early childhood educators: these resources are foundational to our system’s readiness for professional recognition. VTAEYC is laser-focused on recruiting and retaining our workforce that educates our youngest children, and these resources are working. 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.

As the state's largest membership organization for early childhood educators, our role is to elevate their voices. This bill reflects those voices. We believe if we are serious about growing our workforce, we should start by listening to the people doing the work.

2. Workforce Leadership in Shaping S.206

For the record I am Susan Titterton, project coordinator of the workforce-led initiative to advance early childhood education as a profession in Vermont.

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 make recommendations for the design of a profession that would protect and grow our early childhood educator workforce for the future of our state, and our children and families. My role was coordinator of this project and facilitator of our workforce-led task force. I also ensured we were reaching enough workforce members to have a responsible sample size of our full workforce, and that educators from all roles and settings were represented. Our recommendations were created through a consensus process, so we collected this data to show we met our obligations to our full workforce. These consensus reports are all available on VTAEYC's website. Workforce participants showed 89-98% consensus across key components of what became this bill. In total, more than 1,000 Vermont early childhood educators helped design the original recommendations, and many more have participated since as the bill moved through OPR's Sunrise Review and now the legislative process. There is broad, sustained support for this bill among the workforce. I am happy to take further questions about our process.

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](#). The Commission is a profession-led governance structure that currently includes a diverse range of 27 individuals, comprising representatives from 16 early childhood workforce-oriented organizations and 11 early childhood educators from a variety of states and settings including National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC),

National Association for Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE), and the National Education Association (NEA).

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.

4. Workforce Engagement

This bill is the result of years of direct workforce engagement. Early childhood educators, the people doing the work every day, have 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 ultimately led to S.206.

So when I say workforce engagement, I mean that this is not top-down regulation being imposed on a workforce. This is designed by and for the most-impacted stakeholders.

This is important for many reasons, but one of those is that our current child care workforce is familiar with our current child care system. That system is built like an old farmhouse. It's been added to over time: there are duplications, there are doors that no longer lead anywhere. What our workforce initiative did was design a central system that we could bring to OPR and the legislature and say, "Here, we think this will work better for all of us."

Child care investments of recent years, especially Act 76, have changed what's possible—and what's expected. Thank you to the child care champions who had the vision to make the investments child care needed to become sustainable and prioritize children and families in Vermont.

What major investments like Act 76 and Act 45 mean is that our workforce has the capacity to plan for their futures, and not just get through the day. **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 workforce is already getting ready for this transition. Our preparation programs are aligning around professional designations. Our future workforce expects licensure. Our workforce supports this bill because it simplifies and clarifies the complexities we've created over the years.

[I want to call your attention to an op-ed just published by 16 family child care home owners from throughout Vermont.](#) We've heard outside groups talking about how regulations harm family child care, and as a result, rural Vermont. The actual family child care owners in rural Vermont have a different perspective. If you want to know how this bill will impact early childhood educators, please listen to the early childhood educators who know what's in this bill.

5: S.206 Lowers Costs Over Time

Let's get right to the question of cost, because I know that's a concern for this committee. What this bill does is streamline. That means we're ultimately reducing costs.

Things are expensive in Vermont. Costs are rising across the board. Child care is not immune from that. But S.206 is not a mechanism for raising costs, and it doesn't set the stage for raised costs in the future.

1. We would not get behind this bill if we thought there would be cost increases that harm our workforce, or the Vermont families and communities they serve. Act 76 already fundamentally changed and stabilized the financial picture for child care as we move toward the true cost of care. **ECE I, II, and III licensing was built into Vermont's cost of care modeling commissioned by the RAND corporation; this has already been planned into the system.** We wholeheartedly appreciate the public investment of Act 76 and its impact. We are also aware that the child care contribution is an every-paycheck investment made by Vermonters, and we are not here to ask for more.

2. S.206 has the potential to reduce public costs over time. When a system is built without a center, and in a hodgepodge manner—like child care in America—there is a lot that can be unwound when it transforms into a mature, professional system.

Before Vermont's major investments, early childhood educators used to describe the system as "stuck together with bandaids." Some of those bandaids were absolutely critical to the survival of this workforce. They also cost money, and they require overhead.

In the absence of licensure, Vermont and the nation pay for lots of workarounds to ensure some kind of accountability. When we don't have professional standards and competencies,

we pay for other ways to regulate our workforce from the sides. We're currently trying to regulate the individual through the program. A system that centers individual preparation and accountability can streamline all of this. This bill gives us the frame so we can start peeling off some of those bandaids and layered regulations.

3. The only cost to the workforce that is not covered is the licensing fee. But we've looked at the balance sheet, we see several places where we've offset that cost, and we're working on outside funding.

We made a pledge not to advocate for additional costs or fees that weren't unwound somewhere else. Our assessment is that the cost of renewing a license every two years is offset through wage increases that have already happened, resource reallocation, and potentially philanthropy:

- Act 76 investments, and improved funding streams, have already increased compensation for family child care home programs, and in many center-based programs.
- Vermont has robust financial supports to help educators pay for qualifications. Cost-free education leads to better wages. Educators also save money when career paths are clear. No more paying for courses or credentials that don't stack, transfer, or lead to a degree.
- Center directors tell us navigating the qualifications of job applicants and training new staff requires a tremendous amount of time and investment. A system of licensure frees up administrative overhead and reduces staff turnover. That is so valuable that directors have already said, in testimony, they would be willing to cover licensing fees for their staff.
- VTAEYC is already in conversations with philanthropic partners about covering some costs for the initial licensing fee.

6. 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 fills gaps within the existing system. It does not overlap with or replace the role of the Agency of Education or the public school system. It 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 and afterschool-only educators.

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

This bill also does not change Universal Prekindergarten policy or funding structures. Programs participating in UPK would continue to operate as they do now.

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

No one is asking for more regulation for its own sake. We are asking for the right regulation, and a role for early childhood educators in that regulation.

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.

7. 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 career 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.

8. 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. This is especially important for rural communities, where family child care homes are often the primary source of care. The amendments included in S.206 are designed so that these small businesses have flexible, accessible pathways to grow.

That kind of growth should not be the exception. Right now, that path is 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.

9. 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.**

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

Public investment has already been made through Act 76. **But public investment requires public accountability. Licensure provides that accountability, with clear standards for qualifications and transparency.**

Licensure is important for preventing harm, as you heard from OPR. Families want to know that the educators working with their children are qualified to do so. There is currently no way for families to verify the qualifications of their child’s early childhood educator. Licensure creates that transparency.

As for increasing qualifications, 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.

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

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. We are also supporting the current workforce through prior learning assessments, coaching, and scholarships. Of course we know that there are many experienced educators already doing this work who deserve pathways that honor what they know.

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.

11. 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. Stable, high-quality child care supports families' ability to work, reduces stress, and improves long-term outcomes for children.

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.

12. 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.

We know that turnover remains a challenge in this field. Clear pathways, professional recognition, and aligned qualifications are key to improving retention. When these supports are in place, we are already seeing progress.

13. VTAEYC Supports S.206 - Thank You

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

Let me end where I began: the workforce is asking for this. Let's listen to them. They make the choice to show up for children every day because of their commitment to Vermont's children and families. They are asking for clear standards, professional recognition, and a system that will grow and strengthen this field.

S.206 is about simplifying the system, strengthening accountability for existing public investment, and supporting a workforce that Vermont families rely on every day.

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.