

My name is Kristen Dunne, and I'm the executive director of Mary Johnson Children's Center in Middlebury.

I urge you not to reallocate essential funds meant for families and childcare programs right as they are starting to take effect. Act 76 is reaching the families and programs it is intended for and will continue to do so in the months ahead.

Act 76 has already dramatically changed our programs. CCFAP is an important piece of this: when families are relieved of the financial burden of care, they are better able to work. Expanding this program strengthens our state's families and economy.

And CCFAP is not the only piece. Investments in early childhood educators have the effect of retaining our staff, improving the quality of our program, and expanding our capacity to serve more children and families.

- We have hired more staff, opened a new toddler classroom, and are exploring more ways to further serve our community.
- We've gone from no educators enrolled in school to 65% of our early childhood educators
- working toward degrees and credentials, motivated by our ability to provide better compensation for better preparation. We know one of the main predictors of children's healthy development is highly qualified staff.

It's critical to not cut these funds now when the system we've worked so hard for is starting to work. In this session, you have the opportunity to ensure all Vermont children have access to highly qualified staff and programs by establishing the early childhood education profession recommended by the Office of Professional Regulation. We must preserve Act 76 funding to fully solve the child care crisis, and to invest in thriving children and communities.

This funding was dedicated to our state's children and future, and it must stay that way. Thank you for your attention.