

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committees:

My name is Solenne Thompson, and I recently moved from Tunbridge to Bethel this past fall. I am the parent of a 2-and-a-half-year-old son in full time child care and 13-year-old daughter in public school. Until recently I worked full time as a maternal-child home health nurse and still continue in community health. I am writing because I recently learned of the Governor's proposal to reallocate funding intended for child care in the state's 2026 budget, and I can't not speak up against this proposal.

From a personal perspective, child care and the expansion of Vermont's child care subsidy program has been so important for me and my family. My son's child care program has been the touchpoint of stability and routine for my son amidst going between 2 houses, my work schedule, and the social life of his much older sister. When my son got into his child care program at 13 months and I could get financial support through the child care subsidy program, it was a breath of fresh air, and I felt like I wasn't drowning every month. When the state expanded the subsidy last fall thanks to Act 76, it was a significant savings for me, and I know it allowed access to the subsidy for many families who previously were not eligible. I pay just under \$1000/month for child care, which is about a quarter of my take-home income. Keeping child care funding for child care would allow more families to access this important program and hopefully continue to increase subsidy support. Even with the expanded subsidy, there is no wiggle room in my budget.

As a maternal-child home health nurse, I have also seen how Vermont's child care system impacts the families I have worked with. In this work, nurses support families prenatally up until the child's second birthday. I often see an explosion of skills after a child is enrolled in a child care program - gross and fine motor skills, language, and social skills. Even the most well-informed and well-intentioned parent is no match for the power of social persuasion and routine for infants and toddlers under the guidance of a trained professional. The infant and toddler years are critical, and they are hard. The interventions and cost of supporting social-emotional learning only increase if behavior challenges go unaddressed until kindergarten and beyond. I've worked with many young families where access to quality, reliable child care allowed them to get their first jobs or be in school. I've also worked with other people who had to forgo jobs because they did not have child care. This has implications on the long-term financial trajectories of people's lives.

From both a personal and professional perspective, continuing to strengthen Vermont's child care system is one of the best investments we can make as a state. Please protect child care funding in the 2026 state budget and help even more families access and afford child care. Thank you so much for reading my story and for your consideration.

Solenne