



First Children's Finance

Vermont

January 30, 2026

Testimony to Senate Education Committee regarding S.214, an act relating to the provision of pre-kindergarten in geographically isolated school districts

For the record, my name is Erin Roche and I am the Vermont Director of First Children's Finance (FCF). Thank you for having me here again, I hope I can provide some data about the availability of preschool and universal pre-kindergarten in the state and some questions about S.214 that might be helpful as you consider this legislation.

As part of our 2026 child care supply demand gap analysis, FCF produced several supplemental data briefs that were outside the scope of the supply/demand of full-time child care, but of interest for better understanding the whole ecosystem of regulated child care, and acknowledging that families and young children have different needs and our child care ecosystem should offer a variety of settings, to best meet every family's needs. I also want to note the important role of Building Bright Futures and the State of Vermont Child Development Division played in fine tuning the 2026 supply and demand gap analysis and identifying the value of these supplemental briefs. I am grateful for their partnership and expertise.

Today, I would like to share with this committee our supplemental brief titled ["Characteristics of Preschool Capacity in Vermont."](#) While the main supply/demand report focuses on full-time (open at least 40 hours per week) child care, this supplement includes ALL regulated preschool-aged capacity AND the number of three and four year old children statewide and by county. Please note that the most recently available population data available from the VT Department of Health at the time of this report was from July 2024.

Table 1 on p.3 shows that there are 11,013 three and four year olds in Vermont. There is a large variance by county, ranging from 111 in Essex to 2,825 in Chittenden. This table also shows that there are 12,715 licensed preschool spaces, statewide, with most counties having licensed preschool capacity in excess of the number of three

and four year olds. Essex, Franklin, Grand Isle are the only counties that have less licensed capacity than population.

It's important to note that this is all preschool capacity, including but not limited to, Universal PreKindergarten. Not all preschools are Universal PreKindergarten partners. Table 3 on p.4 shows the total Universal PreKindergarten licensed capacity at 9,058 statewide, ranging from 84 in Grand Isle to 2,636 in Chittenden.

After reviewing the proposed legislation, I would like to raise a couple of questions for this committee to consider. First, the legislation specifically references New Hampshire schools but does not refer to specific Vermont counties or communities. If there was insufficient access to Universal PreKindergarten in a county that borders New York for example, this law would not accommodate that. I am wondering if there is a specific Vermont county or school district that this legislation is focused on and should that be explicitly stated in the legislation? And why wouldn't this be equally appropriate to any school district if they did not have adequate Universal PreKindergarten access?

Second, I am not familiar with the New Hampshire (or other border states) Universal PreKindergarten requirements or criteria. Do we have evidence that these programs meet or exceed Vermont's standards?

Third, I am aware that other committees are considering Education Transformation and other changes to Universal PreKindergarten in Vermont. How would the need for this legislation be affected by that?

Fourth, and perhaps just curiosity on my part, I wonder how many children this legislation would impact each year? I believe that every Vermont child deserves access to PreKindergarten and I think it would be helpful to understand the expected scale of this legislation.

Thank you again for having me today. And thank you for all your efforts on behalf of the people of Vermont.