



Date: May 20, 2025

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Finance

Re: H.472, OPR bill section relating to the licensure of early childhood educators

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

Good afternoon. I am Sharron Harrington, Executive Director of the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC). We are the largest statewide membership organization for early childhood educators and the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which promotes high-quality early learning for each and every child, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research.

We partner with the Child Development Division to administer a broad range of programs and services for early childhood educators, and I'll say more about this later, because these successful programs are some of the supports that are in place to help our workforce transition to licensure requirements.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on H.472 and the Vermont Office of Professional Regulation's recommendations for licensing early childhood educators. The OPR's Sunrise Review Report responds to an application VTAEYC submitted in April 2024, which resulted from a multi-year, workforce-led initiative beginning in 2018.

One thing that has impressed me about OPR's approach is that they prioritized the voices of the workforce members who will be regulated by this legislation. OPR has listened to workforce feedback and in some instances, provided compromise revisions.

The OPR's review concluded that individual licensure is necessary to protect the public from harm. But beyond that, thousands of early childhood educators themselves reached consensus: they want professional licensure, they understand the professional qualifications required, and they recognize the value licensure brings. There are several reasons for this.

The current system is complicated. Licensure offers transparency and consistency across settings. Consider the nursing profession: before nursing became a licensed profession, the field was fragmented. Now, when you walk into any setting where nurses work—hospital, primary care, summer camp—and you see RN or LPN on a name tag, you immediately understand their qualifications. And the nursing profession is stronger as a result, with clearer career pathways and better pay.

There are several recent indicators that Vermont's early education system is ready for a recognized, regulated profession of early childhood educators.

First, Vermont has already taken the critical step of investing in the resources early childhood educators need *before* creating a profession with increased requirements for preparation and qualifications. VTAEYC administers some of these programs, including TEACH Early Childhood® Vermont scholarships, Apprenticeship Programs, and student loan repayment assistance. In Vermont, right now, someone can earn the proposed qualifications at little to no cost.

Second, the historic investment of Act 76 is structured to support this profession. This source of stable funding to increase wages and benefits, allows Vermont to support—and retain—our early childhood education workforce as we transition to a system of individual licensure to practice. Per Act 76, the legislature will review minimum professional compensation standards in 2026. With increased pay comes increased accountability, and with public funding comes public accountability.

We are just beginning to see the positive effects. Compensation for some early childhood educators is beginning to improve. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics released their 2024 data in April 2025. That data shows that the median wage for child care workers in Vermont has increased \$4 an hour since 2022. Compensation is essential for recruitment and retention, and it is also key to recognizing that the people working with our youngest and most vulnerable children must be qualified to do so.

Third, early childhood educators are showing their readiness.

There are approximately 6,500 early childhood educators working in nonpublic school settings. I have been told by child care center directors that they would be willing to pay the licensing fees for their staff because it would ensure they have qualified employees. As “the workforce behind the workforce,” improvement in recruitment and retention of early childhood educators leads to greater stability for children, families, employees, and employers.

Research shows that highly qualified early childhood educators lead to better outcomes for children. 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, experience better health.

In summary, OPR's report and workforce recommendations, which are the impetus for this bill being introduced, have VTAEYC's full support.

I base our support on three things:

1. These recommendations are supported by our state's workforce. They are fully aligned.
2. The system is ready and necessary resources and supports already exist.

3. Professional licensure for early childhood educators is best for our children. Individual licensure to practice recognizes individual expertise, prevents harm, enhances the profession's reputation, and demonstrates that licensed early childhood educators are well-equipped to provide safe, quality care for children. Elevating early childhood educators as professionals is the key to doing our best for young children and their families, and to creating our best future as a state

This bill is solid. It is designed to prevent unintended consequences, streamline career pathways, and ensure accountability without adding unnecessary complexity. We urge you to support the bill as introduced. H.472 honors the voice of Vermont's early childhood educators and does what's best for Vermont's youngest children.