

Dear Legislators,

I am writing to express concerns about Bill s.119. I strongly believe that having credentials that prove we are professional educators is necessary. However, I do not believe the only avenue should be through a degree. I believe there should be an opportunity to achieve this through multiple avenues.

I am an early educator with 25 years in the field, including public PreK and Head Start programming. I have a BA in Elementary Education with a focus on Early Education. I have two teaching licenses: one in Elementary Education and an endorsement in Early Childhood Education. I also held a CDA in infant toddler care for many years.

In my experience, some of the best educators, with a degree or not, are the best through their years of experience in the field and because of the many trainings they take over the years. Most importantly, there passion and dedication. My favorite early childhood educator has spent 27 years in the field and has no degree. She effortlessly brings literacy activities to life in the most magical way. She knows and understands child development, absorbs all information received during training/classes, and accurately observes children's behaviors, interests, and developmental needs to develop the most appropriate curriculum for the children she teaches.

With this bill, her experience, knowledge, and abilities will be overlooked. This educator is not going back to school to get her degree, and I don't believe she needs one. My degree did not completely prepare me to be an educator. My Algebra and Statistics class, English Comp, and Native American History have nothing to do with my ability to teach. They have nothing to do with my classroom management skills, my observational or assessment skills, and specifically, nothing to do with child development.

An associate's degree will require individuals to take non-relevant classes that take time, money, and higher-level academic skills that some people don't feel confident about. Why should they have to take Interpersonal Communication to prove they have interpersonal skills they successfully use every day? That's a required 45-hour course, with a minimum of 10-15 hours of homework a week, including research and term papers. When will Family Home providers have the time to do this when they are working 6:30 am-6:30 pm, year-round, without the support provided to public school teachers?

Childcare is as much a trade as any other profession, such as electricians, plumbers, welders, cooks, etc. All of those trades prepare their workers through high-quality internships with some field-specific training and classes. They move up in the ranks as they earn certifications through time in the field, testing, and being observed and critiqued. Some trades workers have a degree, and some do not, yet they are all viewed as professionals. This is mostly due to their knowledge-based experience. Nobody is requiring all electricians to get a degree to continue their work. Why should we expect this of childcare workers?

We should look at elevating the profession by bringing back the value of the CDA or other alternative routes. A CDA used to be held as equivalent to an associate's degree. It is based on a required number of hours in the field, specific training/classes, written and verbal testing, a portfolio process, and observation of the educator applying. The CDA is tailored to the age group and setting you are applying for. It can be obtained within two years with very little expense, and the time commitment is mostly based on your time in the training/classes and classroom or field experience. The CDA also requires regular renewals, just as a teaching license does.

The CDA has been bumped down to a level I under this new bill; in my opinion, it should be a level II. I believe it is a far more accessible option for early educators who are working long hours for little pay and with very few, if any, benefits. Act 76 helped increase our pay, but with or without a degree, it certainly did not create an increase equal to that of public school teachers. It did not give us equal time off to public school teachers or give us access to affordable health care. I think it is unfair to ask us to meet similar qualifications until we are given the same benefits.

The main difference between a CDA and an associate's degree is that the CDA is based on relevant experience and education, whereas the associate's degree requires many non-relevant courses to be obtained. The tier system proposed does not differentiate the massive difference between an associate's and a bachelor's degree since both can be identified as “teachers.” Why would a CDA have less relevance than an associate's degree since it has a higher focus on proving your knowledge and understanding of appropriate practices and child development than an associate's degree.

For example, to become a public school teacher, you need one semester of student teaching. This is roughly 45 hours of field experience and two observations. To obtain a CDA you need 480 hours of field experience. An associate's degree requires 60 credits. Of those, only 8 are ECE classes. One of the eight is a four-credit field experience course that is only worth 45 hours of time in a classroom vs the 480 required for the CDA. Seven classes in ECE are equivalent to 21 credits.

Furthermore, an associate's degree can be obtained without an educator ever taking an ECE course if they choose to take a portfolio class to earn credits for what they know. Most

individuals that I have supported through this process stop after this course. This is because they cannot get out of the general education courses like English Comp and college-level math requirements. Someone who does get their associate's after completing the portfolio course (earning credit for what you know) and the general requirements doesn't necessarily have any learning in ECE if they used work-based experience to say they don't need to take the classes. Yet, a CDA requires proof of training and courses taken with a higher level of field experience.

I think a good compromise would be to increase the number of hours of training and field experience in addition to holding a CDA to be more comparable to that of what an associate's degree would require for your ECE core classes. Make a rule that states that an individual with a CDA must also meet a training requirement minimum of 315 hours instead of the current 120 hours. This would make the actual ECE training equivalent to that of someone with 21 credits as required with an associate's degree and more attainable. I think you will find most Early childhood educators already meet that requirement as they are regularly taking training/classes.

Another thing to consider is that center-based programs will suffer, too. Center-based programs will see valuable staff leave due to not having a degree. It's not easy to find individuals with a degree willing to work in childcare due to the lack of equal pay, benefits, and longer hours than what's offered in public schools. If they cannot operate classrooms with a mixture of experience and education, they may not be able to find enough staff that meet the requirements proposed in this bill to stay open.

As stated above, I agree that there needs to be a system that supports Early Childhood Educators being viewed and valued as professionals. I do not believe it needs to be based solely on a college education. My concern is that Vermont will see a mass exodus from the field,

specifically from home providers, regardless of the extensive timeline proposed. I think being sensitive to the specific needs and struggles of Early Childhood Educators needs to be considered. I fear that if they are overlooked, Vermont families will lose out on exceptional educators by making them feel forced out of the field if a degree becomes the only pathway. I ask you to please evaluate the recommendations carefully and create an amendment that offers additional pathways that are more accessible to our dedicated providers.

Sincerely,

Concerned Early Educator