

## **Alora Zargo - OPR Public Meeting - September 17 - in person**

My name is Alora Zargo. I am a senior in high school, and I'm enrolled in the Early Childhood Education program at the Windham Regional Career Center in Brattleboro. Over the past three years, I've had the incredible opportunity to work with passionate teachers and professionals like Ms. Freeman, gaining both field experience and college credits. I've actually completed my required coursework in Early Childhood Education and am earning more college credits and job experience as a Youth Apprentice.

When I first started, I thought working in early childhood education would be fun, but I didn't fully understand how much responsibility it involved. I think a lot of people think it's an easy job. Or a pit stop job, on their way to something else. They think, you're just playing with little kids, I could do that. Well, I've learned that early childhood education is much more than just playing. It's about building relationships, making decisions based on child development, communicating with families, and showing up prepared to support every child in your care. So it takes a lot of work to make all that play look so easy.

If you have to earn a license to work with young children, it will help ensure that the people doing the work are serious about it and have the knowledge they need to succeed, and to help children succeed. I've already seen people come and go from centers I work in, because they weren't prepared for the challenges of the job.

Licensure will encourage those who are passionate about this work to continue pursuing the necessary education, which will ultimately reduce turnover and ensure that children are cared for by dedicated, knowledgeable professionals.

If you look at it like a career, there are a lot of ways to get in the door. I'm graduating high school qualified for ECE I licensure, and more than halfway to ECE II qualifications. I have a lot of college credits and a clear vision of my future. I plan to continue my education, earning my associate and eventually my bachelor's degree in early childhood education. I can even see myself going on to get a master's degree, and possibly becoming a teacher who helps future early childhood educators find their passion, just as Ms. Freeman has done for me.

Licensure creates a pathway for students like me to envision a lifelong career in early childhood education. It's not just a pit stop; it's a meaningful, rewarding profession.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience and perspective.