

Senate Committee on Government Operations – March 27, 2025
Statement by Don Tinney, Vermont-NEA President

As a licensed professional educator who taught English in Vermont high schools for 31 years, and as a former chair of the Vermont Standards Board of Professional Educators, I welcome this opportunity to comment on S.119, an act related to the licensure of early childhood educators.

As president of Vermont-NEA, representing nearly 13,000 educators across our great state, I can assure you that all our members know the value of early childhood education. Whether they are high school chemistry teachers, kindergarten teachers, school bus drivers, or paraeducators, all our educators respect and appreciate the importance of Vermont's early childhood education system and have great admiration for all those working to meet the learning needs of young children. We applaud all efforts to further professionalize the ECE workforce and to improve the compensation and benefits for those who work in this area; early childhood education should be a viable lifelong career option for these devoted educators.

It is this level of respect for the early childhood education workforce that leads us to conclude that the licensure of early childhood educators needs to remain within the jurisdiction of the Vermont Standards Board of Professional Educators, supported by the Vermont Agency of Education. The VSBPE process assures that the holders of the Early Childhood Education license are authorized and qualified to teach young children and base their practice on a deep understanding of early childhood development. The importance of our early childhood education programs is also reflected in the fact that the VSBPE also offers an endorsement for an Early Childhood Special Educator.

As you know, the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators is a 13-member, teacher majority, policy-making board appointed by the governor that oversees the training, licensing and professional standards of teachers and administrators. Governor Shumlin appointed me to the board in 2014, and Governor Scott re-appointed me in 2017; and as a result of my experience working with both the board and the AOE staff during my tenure, I can assure you that these dedicated professionals work diligently to promote educator quality and hold all educators and administrators accountable to clear, high standards.

With two license endorsement areas for early childhood education teachers already in place, we believe implementing a new and different licensure process for early childhood educators would create a "separate but equal" set of standards through OPR. We do not believe a redundant system would serve either our preK-12 system or the ECE system.

As a lifelong educator and as president of Vermont's largest labor union, I am proud of the high standards to which Vermont educators hold themselves and hold each other through our rigorous licensing process. When Vermont families send their precious and beloved children to our schools—high school, middle school, elementary school, or pre-school—they need to know that all their children's teachers are highly qualified and highly skilled to guide their students' learning, growth and development. A license issued by the Vermont Standards Board of Professional Educators already provides that assurance.