

Dear Senate Committee,

I write with deep concern about the proposal to apply ECE II education qualifications to Family Child Care Homes (FCCH), effectively requiring providers to obtain an Associate's degree within six years. This sweeping requirement will destabilize Vermont's early childhood system—particularly in rural areas—by forcing many experienced and dedicated FCCH providers out of the field.

According to VTAEYC's Application for Preliminary Sunrise Review Assessment (p. 38), **“The nearly 28% of current early childhood educators who we anticipate would not qualify for a license includes many experienced practitioners.”** The 2024 Vermont Early Childhood and Afterschool Professionals Workforce Report shows only 2,503 out of 4,218 (59.3%) have an Associate's degree or above. Of degree holders, “The highest number of degrees 1026 (41%) have a concentration identified as ‘other’”, indicating fields not related to education (i.e. accounting).

Although NAEYC's Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession (the foundation for S. 0119) calls for “recognizing their diversity, dedication, and experience to ensure that they are not summarily pushed out of the profession,” many providers feel exactly that risk.

Vermont's STep Ahead Recognition and Improvement System (STARS) heavily reduced the emphasis on formal education in rating quality, instead focusing on adult-child interactions, family/youth engagement, and responsive practices in its newest revision. By contrast, the VTAEYC Task Force has introduced a rigid assumption of program quality: those who hold a degree are higher quality than those who do not.

Among the providers already with a degree, Danielle Huston says, “While degrees are important, they are not the only way to measure high-quality childcare.” Providers such as Jeanine Wixson emphasize that a degree alone does not change the quality of care: “A degree will not change how I take care of children—experience helps with that.” Rachel Bolduc points out, “I've worked in the field directly with children providing high quality care for 26 years... That's what can never be replaced—the experience.”

Major concerns were raised to VTAEYC and have not been addressed. “We don't want to lose anyone or push people out; we want to grow [the State's] capacity. Years of experience and professional development should count. I don't want to be ‘knocked back’ from where I am now. What about those who got their degrees in other fields?” reported in VTAEYC Three Designations with Aligned Preparation Pathways Consensus Document, April 2021 (P. 7).

Many FCCH providers have voiced that they will close instead of pursuing formal degrees. In a small survey of providers, individuals like Marissa Green noted, **“In all honesty, I would likely**

seek employment elsewhere and close my program due to these hardships.” Burnout from already demanding work is a recurring theme among providers.

Even if tuition is subsidized, the opportunity cost is high. Pursuing a degree often means scaling back work hours or losing income, decreasing available child care slots. Providers like Grace Schaefer and Leanne Judkins, who routinely work 50 hours per week, see no viable way to balance college requirements with maintaining their programs.

“...reading this brought me tears....I couldn’t believe this was actually happening. I started my registered home back in 2012.... I absolutely love my program. I am a 46 year old and mother of 3.... I have learned so much from experiences alone that I don’t feel a college degree could teach.” — Elisha Santarcangelo

The following providers have expressed they will likely close their child care programs if S. 0119 becomes law: Amanda Williams, Carmel Souliere, Elisha Santarcangelo, Grace Schaefer, Kristin Poirier, Leanne Judkins, Marissa Green, Merridith Sylvester, Nan Reid, Rachel Bolduc, Rumsey Torrey, Sarah Delage, Shannon Davis, Stacey Anne Mudgett, Tami C Perron.

Vermont is already experiencing child care shortages, particularly in rural areas. Forcing providers out of the field would exacerbate these gaps, limiting families’ access to high-quality, consistent care. **“In Montpelier when we enrolled kids, there were very few choices, effectively home daycare—or...we were on a waitlist,”** says Stan Brinkerhoff, a Vermont parent.

Vermont’s early childhood landscape has significantly evolved thanks to the tireless efforts of providers, advocates, and policymakers committed to improving outcomes for children. We see these efforts reflected in the dedicated providers who often work overtime and in the experiences of those who have shaped Vermont’s strong early childhood programs.

Instead of pushing experienced providers of Family Child Care Homes who do not hold a degree out of the field, we should focus on rewarding and incentivizing those who do pursue higher education—without diminishing the value of those who continue to provide high-quality care based on deep experience and commitment.

Thank you,

Giovanni Tabor, MFA