

Date: March 26, 2025

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Government Operations

Re: S.119, an act relating to the licensure of early childhood educators

From: Sharron Harrington, Executive Director, Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children  
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Additional Materials: 2025 S.119 VTAEYC Testimony Slides-3.26.2025 (attached separately)

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Good afternoon. I am Sharron Harrington, Executive Director of the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC). I am joined today by my colleague, Susan Titterton, the Project Coordinator for the initiative to establish an early childhood education profession.

VTAEYC is a non-profit organization that is the largest membership organization for early childhood educators in the state, and we are the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), one of the country's leading early childhood education organizations. As a national organization, NAEYC's key role is to promote high-quality early learning for each and every child, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research.

In Vermont, VTAEYC works to advance equity and excellence in early childhood education. Our organization's vision is that Vermont's children thrive and realize their true promise in supportive communities. We also partner with the Child Development Division to administer a broad range of programs and services for early childhood educators. These resources are foundational to our system's readiness for licensing early childhood educators

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on S.119 and the Vermont Office of Professional Regulation's (OPR) recommendations for licensing early childhood educators. OPR's Sunrise Review Report responds to an application VTAEYC submitted in April 2024, which resulted from a multi-year, workforce-led initiative. We are here to share why our state's early childhood education workforce requested professional recognition.

SLIDE 2

## **Defining Early Childhood Education and Who We Are Regulating**

[Susan Titterton]

You may hear both "child care" and "early childhood education." But what are we really talking about? Tammie Hazlett, a family child care provider in Thetford and a leader in this work, put it best:

*“We call some programs child care and we call some programs preschool or pre-k, but early childhood education is what happens in every quality program, no matter where it is set or what ages are taught.”*

Our goal, and I feel confident this is shared by everyone here, is that Vermont’s youngest children are cared for so they are safe, comfortable, happy, have lots of opportunities to learn and explore and make friends, and are ready when they start kindergarten.

SLIDE 3

## **Where Young Children Are**

Young children participate in early childhood education in a variety of settings. The Child Development Division (CDD) regulates family child care home programs and center-based programs—both nonprofit and for-profit. S.119 proposes to license the teachers working in these regulated programs.

Public pre-K programs are regulated by both CDD and AOE. The AOE has an established licensure system that aligns with the standards in S.119. If an educator holds an AOE license with an early childhood endorsement, they automatically qualify for ECE licensure through OPR. It’s complementary, not parallel. This alignment ensures clear career pathways for those transitioning between private and public settings.

## **Simplifying Regulation**

Early childhood is already a complicated system, involving CDD, the Agency of Education (AOE), and now the OPR. It may seem odd that adding another regulatory body simplifies things, but it does.

We agree with OPR’s finding that early childhood education should be governed by a board of its own experts, rather than by another such as the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators, whose expertise is related to the larger public school system and not specifically early childhood education as delivered across a mixed system.

Currently, many child care program regulations exist because our system has no way of knowing the qualifications of the people working in those programs. Vermont may be able to simplify regulations over time once we have a regulation system focused on the *people* responsible for caring for young children. A licensed workforce could allow for unwinding some regulations.

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## **Why A License to Practice?**

[Sharron Harrington]

If these programs are already regulated, why do individual educators need licenses?

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.

## Clarity and Career Pathways

The current system is complicated. Licensure through OPR 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, assisted care facility, 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.

Similarly, early childhood educators tell us that a professional licensing system would clarify career pathways, help them communicate their skills to the public, and create fairer compensation across different program types. Many describe licensure as a means of securing the professional *respect* they deserve.

## Increased Qualifications Lead to Improved Child Outcomes

Why are we talking about increasing qualifications? Why not lower them to expand our workforce?

The most important reason is because it's best for children. The metric for this is "child outcomes." Research shows that highly qualified child care teachers 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.

By ensuring consistent qualifications across all early childhood settings, we ensure that no matter what child care a child attends, they are supported by an educator who is prepared to help them become a lifelong learner ready for kindergarten. And, the standards proposed for ECE I, II, and III qualifications align with public school standards, supporting—not competing with—the existing system.

## Accountability and Public Investment

Licensure is essential for public accountability. Vermont has already made historic investments in child care through Act 76. Per Act 76, state agencies will deliver a report to the legislature in 2026 on establishing minimum pay standards for early childhood educators. With increased pay comes increased accountability, and with public funding comes public accountability. That's supported through a system of individual professional licensure.

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## Honoring Our Workforce

[Sharron Harrington]

## A Slow, Supported Timeline

From day one, our top concern about increasing qualifications—and the number one concern among the workforce—has been avoiding unintended consequences, such as driving people out of the field or causing program closures. Our state cannot afford that.

## SLIDE 6

OPR has thoroughly addressed this concern, including a phased-in timeline and providing a renewable transition license for everyone in regulated programs who does not yet meet the OPR's recommended qualifications.

Additionally, Vermont has built significant resources to support educators in increasing their qualifications. Scholarships, student loan repayment programs, and apprenticeship programs are already in place and are extremely popular. These resources ensure that early childhood educators are not burdened with the financial cost of meeting new qualifications.

## **We Need Your Support**

## SLIDE 7

I want to take a minute to tell you about where these recommendations come from, and to include a respectful request.

These recommendations were developed through years of engagement with the early childhood workforce across all settings—family child care homes, nonprofit and for-profit centers, public schools, and workforce preparation programs. Thousands of early educators participated, raising important questions and concerns that have been addressed in OPR's report.

## SLIDE 8

By the time our workforce formally requested regulation from OPR, they had reached a strong consensus. OPR's own independent, rigorous review confirmed their recommendations—going even further to provide additional transition accommodations for the current workforce.

This bill is solid. It is designed to prevent unintended consequences, streamline career pathways, and ensure accountability without adding unnecessary complexity. If it is taken apart, we risk duplicating systems and creating barriers to professional growth.

## SLIDE 9

We urge you to support the bill as introduced. S.119 honors the voice of Vermont's early childhood educators and does what's best for Vermont's youngest children. VTAEYC fully supports the recommendations outlined in OPR's Sunrise Review Report. On page 36 of the report, the OPR writes, "Professional regulation of individual Early Childhood Educators working with children from ages 0 to 8 will yield substantial benefits to children."

That is why we are here. Like the OPR, VTAEYC—and the workforce we represent—know individual professional preparation and accountability is what is best for children.

## SLIDE 10

Thank you for your time and consideration. We welcome your questions.