



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

To: Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

Re: S.206 – An act relating to licensure of early childhood educators by the Office of Professional Regulation

Dear Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Danielle Harris, and I am the Senior Director of Youth Development at the Greater Burlington YMCA. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of professionalizing early childhood education in Vermont. The Y shares support for efforts that bring greater clarity, consistency, and professional recognition to early childhood work, as these educators carry enormous responsibility and they deserve pathways that reflect the importance of their role.

That said, while the Y supports the goal of professionalization, we would like to share a few concerns we have with this bill, as well as offer suggested changes. Our concerns largely focus on demographics and workforce challenges, proposed licensure fees, and quality of care equity.

Demographics & Workforce

The Y, like so many other programs and professions in the state, face significant workforce shortages. Each year, we seek to fill on average four full time teacher positions and four “floater” positions in our downtown location. Most applicants are not qualified; many often have little or no experience, or limited education. The average time to fill a position typically takes 3-6 months, sometimes longer. Though our programs have retained well, we have had two applicants who were technically qualified for an open position, but unfortunately neither replied for interviews.

We see our challenges in hiring as a symptom of the demographics in our state. As you are familiar, Vermont is graduating fewer high school students each year, and we have a limited number of college graduates staying in Vermont and entering the workforce. The Vermont Futures Project reports that Vermont needs to add 13,500 workers annually to improve affordability and ensure maintenance of essential services, like childcare. Given Vermont’s worker shortage and shrinking graduate pipeline, new barriers to entry could intensify existing workforce challenges, including for qualified educators seeking to move into the state.

Additionally, this bill does not go far enough to be inclusive of early ed workers that have significant experience in the field, further limiting their upward mobility within the profession. For instance, we have an assistant teacher who has been with the Y for about 17 years. She is a popular staff member who is great with the kids; she’d be a wonderful lead teacher. Unfortunately, she does not have a higher education degree and is therefore disqualified from consideration whenever we have lead teacher openings. We’ve asked whether she would like to go back to school, but she has expressed

concern and is intimidated by the process. With three children and limited funds and time to dedicate to coursework, she has opted to stay in the field at a level that is below her proven ability.

Our suggestion: Examine competency-based pathways to licensure. We know that experience and demonstrated competencies often equal or exceed degree attainment. This is evident in §6221(c). However, the language is vague on which competencies acquired through experience would count toward credit, and whether the provider seeking licensure would still need to pay for the credits from the educational program. We would prefer that the Office of Professional Regulation (OPR) create a parallel, non-degree pathway that evaluates all competencies and experience of providers to obtain licensure. In addition, OPR and/or the proposed board, should have structures in place that enable new residents to, as expeditiously as possible, enter the field.

Licensing Fees

The biannual licensing fees suggested in this legislation are disproportionate relative to typical ECE wages. For many of our staff, the fees could be approximately 30% of their weekly pay. While issued biannually, each time renewal comes around, this amount could be burdensome.

Our suggestion: Our team would like these fees to be reduced or otherwise allow for providers to access special funds to help offset the cost of renewal.

Quality of Care.

The Y understands the vital importance of high quality and accessible childcare, which makes home-based care an essential piece to the early ed landscape. However, we are concerned that there is a diminution of quality as it pertains to home-based providers outlined in §6221(b)(4), whereby a family childcare provider need only be in good standing with the Child Development Division as of January 1, 2029, to qualify for licensure. We would like to see parity and equity in the expected quality of care across the early childhood education sector.

Our suggestion: Set the expectation that all providers, whether home-based or center-based, meet the same standards for licensure. We would anticipate a non-degree, competency-based pathway to help in this regard as well.

Conclusion

The YMCA supports and commends the Committee's intent to elevate early childhood education as a profession and to bring clarity to requirements that are currently difficult to navigate. As this workforce is formally professionalized, we respectfully urge careful consideration of experience-based pathways, the minimization of financial and administrative burdens, and policies that ensure high-quality care across the full spectrum of providers.

Thank you for your time today and I'm happy to take any questions.

Sincerely,



Danielle Harris (she, her, hers)

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