



TO: Chair Lyons and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

FROM: Dr. Kaitlin Northey, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education, University of Vermont

DATE: February 4, 2026

RE: S. 206, the “Early Childhood Educator Profession Bill”

Additional Materials: Summary Document: Vermont Higher Education Landscape Analysis; VT Digger Opinion piece (November 24, 2025) “Heather Duhamel and Kaitlin Northey: Vermont must protect and strengthen the programs that prepare early childhood educators”

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Good morning, I’m Dr. Kaitlin Northey, and I’m an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Vermont. Through our undergraduate early childhood teacher preparation program students earn a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood and, upon program completion and graduation, a recommendation for an Agency of Education teaching license for birth through third grade. The views and statements I offer today are my own. They do not represent the positions or opinions of the University of Vermont or any of its offices, departments, or leadership.

I’m in favor of S. 206’s proposed system to license and regulate early childhood educators in child care and non-public settings.

S. 206 addresses gaps in our current regulatory systems and I believe the bill will positively impact the preparation, qualifications, and regulation of our early childhood workforce and, therefore, the quality of early care and education children and families experience.

**First, S. 206 will license Early Childhood Educators who are not individually regulated through existing systems.**

- The gaps in our existing regulatory systems leave children, families, programs, and the workforce vulnerable to harm.
  - Prekindergarten (PreK) teachers and those who work in public school settings are required to have a teaching license with appropriate endorsement through our Agency of Education (AoE). I am a supporter of the AoE’s teacher licensure system and I believe it is meeting the needs of public schools, but it is only serving a subset of the early childhood workforce. Vermont’s youngest children and their families are served by a variety of early childhood care and education settings outside of public schools.
  - The regulatory system for child care regulates programs, not people. This limits our ability to hold individuals accountable for unprofessional conduct and to signal that someone should not work with children.
- As the proposed licensure system covers individuals who are not currently served by existing systems, none of the licensure categories are duplicative to what exists now.

- Research suggests there may be additional challenges or barriers to becoming a state education agency/department licensed teacher (e.g., IOM & NRC, 2015; McLean et al., 2021; Souto-Manning et al., 2020), as even with supports and incentives to meet requirements, Early Childhood Educators working in child care centers were more likely to earn an early childhood bachelor's degree than the degree and a state education teaching license (Frede et al., 2007).
- The system proposed in S. 206 will complement existing regulatory systems (e.g., child care programs, AoE teacher licensure endorsements).
  - For example, nurses are licensed and regulated through OPR but a nurse can choose to receive an additional licensure endorsement through the Agency of Education to become a public-school nurse. In early childhood, we currently have a regulatory system for public school educators, but not the broader workforce who work in non-public settings.

**Second, S. 206 recognizes and values the skills, competencies, and qualifications of the early childhood workforce.**

- Supporting the learning and development of young children requires education and expertise, which is why Early Childhood Educators' qualifications have consistently been identified as a key component of providing quality early childhood education and care opportunities for young children.
  - Drawing on decades of research (e.g., IOM & NRC, 2015), the early childhood field recommends Early Childhood Educators have a bachelor's degree and specialized training in early childhood (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2024 see descriptions of quality benchmarks 3 and 4, pp. 30-31), as the combination of these two factors (i.e., bachelor's degree *and* specialized early childhood training) produces stronger child outcomes than either factor separately (e.g., Bueno et al., 2010).
- S. 206 is a step in the right direction as establishing consistent, competency-based expectations for Educators' qualifications and introducing individual accountability are important if we are to begin addressing the equity issues that disparate qualifications have caused within our system.
  - Overcoming sector-based (e.g., public school, child care, Head Start) differences in teacher qualification policies to create consistent expectations for all Early Childhood Educators will require intentional design across systems (e.g., policies, infrastructure, compensation, working conditions; IOM & NRC, 2015 see recommendation 2 (pp. 6-7) of Qualification Requirements for Professional Practice, pp. 6-8).

**Third, S. 206's licensure categories will establish clear, easy-to-understand terminology to describe Early Childhood Educators' qualifications and competencies.**

- Consistent terminology for Early Childhood Educators' qualifications increases alignment and coherence across multiple systems, including within our state's early childhood workforce, the early childhood workforce nationally, and the systems that support early childhood teacher preparation and career advancement.

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- S. 206 includes competency-based licensure categories (ECE I, II, and III) that reflect the terminology and leveled standards and competencies recommended by national early childhood advocates (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020).
- For more than five years, Vermont's early childhood higher education faculty, advocates, and other stakeholders have been using the national recommendations for ECE I, II, and III to improve alignment and articulation across our early childhood preparation programs' coursework, experiences, and supports (e.g., Northey & Titterton, 2023). Implementing S. 206's licensure categories, which are aligned with state and national efforts, may make it easier for people to navigate education pathways, professional development opportunities, and career advancement.
- Additionally, the proposed ECE I, II, and III licenses can serve as objective criteria higher education faculty can use to identify qualified mentor teachers to support students' field experiences (e.g., practicum placements, student teaching internships).
  - Field experiences are integral to teacher preparation as they provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to apply their learning in real classrooms under the supervision of effective mentor teachers (NAEYC, 2020).
  - However, inconsistent expectations for Early Childhood Educators' qualifications in child care settings has made it challenging for preparation programs to identify mentor teachers with the competencies needed for quality field experiences. This is a problem we don't have in public school settings where teachers must have an AoE license (IOM & NRC, 2015).
  - Clear and consistent terminology will make it easier to recognize the qualifications of our current EC workforce and contribute to increasing the quality of pre-service teachers' preparation, supporting the development and learning of our future early childhood workforce.
- Proposed licensure categories can be understood by the public (e.g., parents, caregivers, intervention specialists, researchers) and are likely to be useful to those outside of child care, as well, when making informed hiring decisions (e.g., parent hiring a nanny, objective criteria for hiring assistant teachers or paraprofessionals in public schools).

**Fourth, S. 206 recognizes and values early childhood education and the collective power of the early childhood workforce in Vermont.**

- By recognizing the education and expertise required to be an effective Early Childhood Educator, S. 206 will increase recognition and respect for Early Childhood Educators, which can incentivize educators to pursue or continue careers in child care.
  - My UVM early childhood students are committed to the early childhood profession and are excited by Vermont's vision of the future!
  - Pre-service Early Childhood Educators want the public to recognize the expertise required to work in child care (Northey & Clark, 2025) and a licensure system that values their education is part of a professional system.

- ECE III, in particular, is a licensure category that will be key to retaining Early Childhood Educators with an early childhood bachelor's degree in child care settings, especially if we can link compensation to qualifications in the future.
- Our public investments, especially those that support the education of our current workforce and pre-service teachers, are working!
  - Vermont's Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division (2026) recently reported a 22.4% increase from 2022 in the number of individuals working in regulated early childhood education and afterschool programs who have earned an associate degree or higher.
  - Full-time Early Childhood Educators who participated in focus groups for my study on students' experiences in early childhood teacher preparation programs described how public investments in their education helped them feel "recognized, valued, and respected by policymakers and the public" (Northey & Couzo, 2025, p. 19).
  - Anecdotally, I can report that Student Loan Repayment Assistance Programs for Early Childhood Educators did help incentivize a few of our graduates (with a bachelor's degree and AoE teaching license) to work in child care settings after graduation.
- Increased visibility and advocacy for early childhood education in Vermont has increased general interest in early childhood.
  - In fall 2024, UVM launched an interdisciplinary Childhood Studies minor because we noticed that undergraduate students were interested in learning more about early childhood, even if they weren't planning to be educators. Within the first year it enrolled 46 students and it currently has 89 students from a wide variety of majors.
- S. 206 reflects national recommendations and the voices of Vermont's Early Childhood Educators and its proposal to establish a professional board of licensees to develop and oversee regulation of the profession honors the capacity and vision of the workforce.
  - Vermont's current and future Early Childhood Educators are advocates and agents of change who are actively engaged and invested in shaping the professional identity of our field.
- Across the nation, the early childhood field is watching what happens in Vermont (e.g., Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education, 2025; NAEYC, 2025).

In closing, decades of research have demonstrated that qualified Early Childhood Educators are one of the most important influences on the quality of young children's early childhood education experiences. S. 206 will positively impact the preparation, qualifications, and regulation of our early childhood workforce. Increasing the quality of our state's birth through 21 education system contributes to increased positive outcomes and benefits for children, families, society, and our state.

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