

Good afternoon, my name is Meghan Meszkat, and I serve as the Director of Early Childhood Education for the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union. I am licensed through the AOE as an Early Childhood Special Education teacher and PreK-12 Principal. I want to be clear that the testimony I am providing is based on my experience as an Early Childhood Educator and administrator and not the view of the SVSU where I work. I have previously worked in both private and public Early Childhood Programs. My current job responsibilities include administration of UPK as well as Early Childhood Special Education. Additionally, I have been deeply involved in the workforce driven movement to create this profession and hope I can give a perspective of why I am in favor.

In my role, I oversee Early Childhood Special Education services for children ages 3-5. In our community, over a third of our PreK students qualify for these services, and we have a high percentage of infants and toddlers receiving services through early intervention. High quality care helps them develop toward the milestones they need to reach to be ready for kindergarten, and it meets state-mandated requirements to provide services in their natural setting. That's a big reason why I support the clarity of individual licensure with specific and consistent qualifications as proposed by OPR.

For children to make meaningful progress, the special education team must collaborate with the early childhood educators who spend eight or more hours a day with them. This collaboration is most effective when early educators have a strong understanding of child development, can identify developmental milestones, and are equipped to implement intervention strategies throughout the day. When early childhood educators lack consistent qualifications, children's needs may go unrecognized, delaying critical support sometimes until children enter kindergarten. The ECE license ensures all early childhood educators complete coursework on differing abilities, creating a consistent standard across settings that strengthens both early learning and our school systems. In order for this system to work, the ECE license framework has to be uniform across settings. The great strength of this system design is its simplicity and inclusion of educators in all non-public education settings. When interventionist and special education teachers go into a community setting they will easily benefit from an understanding of each classroom staff individual background and licensure. This will help tailor the level of support adults need as well as ensure consistent practices across settings.

The ECE I, II, and III licenses proposed by OPR are grounded in developmentally appropriate practice and professional standards. They align with the national framework advanced by the Commission on Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education, which is gaining traction in multiple states, and will eventually make it much easier to

hire educators from other states. Through individual regulation across settings, we expand access to appropriate placements and ensure every child has access to qualified educators who can set them up for later success. Individual licensure ensures accountability, strengthens the overall qualifications of the workforce, and improves outcomes for children.

I'm happy to take questions. Thank you.

In response to the question about OPR's regulation of licensure vs that of CDD or AOE I would like to emphasize that we have many careers in education that require individuals to hold a license with OPR as well as AOE. These individuals have been able to navigate these systems and see their OPR license as their professional license and the AOE piece related to their place of work. I personally do not see any reason why this should be a concern for those working in the Early Childhood Education field.