



Date: January 28, 2026
To: Chair Lyons and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
CC: Representative Rey Garofano & Senator Martine Larocque Gulick, Legislative reps. on the State Advisory Council
From: Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director, and Anna Brouillette, Policy and Program Director, Building Bright Futures
Re: Act 76 Monitoring and Early Childhood Educator Licensure (S. 206)

Overview

Building Bright Futures (BBF) is designated in statute as Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council and the entity charged with monitoring and advising on the early childhood system, including the implementation of Act 76. Our role is to help the Legislature and the Administration understand not just whether policies are being implemented, but whether they are working in practice, for families, for educators, and for the system as a whole.

BBF does not take positions for or against specific legislation. Our responsibility is to provide independent, evidence-informed monitoring and to elevate system-level considerations that can help ensure that policy choices are sequenced wisely, implemented effectively, and adapted over time.

Act 76: What We Are Seeing in 2025

Our 2025 Act 76 Monitoring Report shows that Vermont's early childhood system has crossed an important threshold. Act 76 is no longer simply being implemented. It is now operating at scale.

Across the state, we are seeing:

- Substantially increased family access to child care through CCFAP
- More predictable and stable program revenue
- Significant new public investment flowing through the system
- Early but real signals of improvements in wages, benefits, and program-level quality investments
- A system that is larger, more complex, and more interconnected than it was just a few years ago

These are meaningful and hard-won gains.

At the same time, our monitoring also makes clear that the system remains fragile. This fall, BBF conducted listening sessions and partner conversations across the state. The single most consistent theme we heard, by far, was workforce. In every region and every type of setting, programs described workforce supply, recruitment, and retention as the number one constraint on access, stability, and growth.

We also heard consistently that administrative and operational complexity has increased faster than capacity, and that because the system is now larger and more interdependent, workforce policy changes now have faster and broader ripple effects than they did before Act 76.

This is the context in which BBF is approaching the question of educator licensure.



Alignment between S.206, the Vermont Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030, and Policy Recommendations on behalf of the Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network

At a values level, BBF hears strong alignment across the field around the goals behind S.206. There is a widely shared desire to:

- Children should be educated in safe, high-quality early childhood settings
- Recognize early childhood educators as the skilled professionals they are
- The need for a well-prepared, well-qualified early childhood education workforce
 - Create clearer and more portable career pathways
 - Defined expectations for preparation and compensation
- Accountable and transparent systems
- Improve public understanding of the complexity and importance of this work

Those goals are deeply consistent with the long-term direction Vermont has been moving under Act 76 and [Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030](#), specifically in the following sections:

- *Ensure children are educated and cared for in high-quality environments and by well-prepared early childhood educators.*
- *Advance a well-prepared, well-qualified early childhood workforce by developing a clear system of professional expectations, career pathways, and accountability.*

The [2026 Policy Recommendations](#) on behalf of the State Advisory Council Network emphasize the importance of progress toward the two goals and objectives articulated in the 2030 strategic plan:

Implement a licensure system for Vermont's early childhood educators to strengthen accountability through clear quality benchmarks, consistent with recommendations from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). Recognize and address concerns from the field and families by ensuring the transition is gradual, well-supported, and aligned across agencies, and that potential confusion with other licensing systems is minimized. Monitor workforce data to assess impacts, guide implementation, and ensure the pipeline of new early educators remains strong and sustainable. Identify strategies to help early education programs cover licensure costs for their staff to ensure accessibility and equity.

The core question BBF is raising is not whether professionalization matters. It is how and when a change of this magnitude should be implemented in a system that is still in an active phase of stabilization and build-out. Additionally, specific focus should be given to how to ensure that the current workforce and workforce pipeline are supported throughout this transition.

Implementation Considerations

From BBF's monitoring and from conversations with partners across the system, there is broad alignment around the goals of professionalization and stronger career pathways. At the same time, there is also consistent and thoughtful feedback about the importance of getting the design and rollout right.



In particular, we continue to hear several practical considerations that deserve careful attention as this proposal moves forward.

1. **First, partners are focused on workforce and program stability.** In a system where workforce shortages are already the primary constraint on access, there is understandable concern about any change that could unintentionally accelerate attrition, especially in the short term or in hard-to-staff regions and settings. This is particularly salient for family child care and rural communities, where even small changes in supply can have outsized impacts on access.
2. **Second, there are important questions about alignment and simplicity.** Vermont's early childhood system already involves multiple agencies and regulatory structures, including CDD and AOE. We hear both interest in greater coherence and concern about adding another layer of oversight if roles, responsibilities, and points of accountability are not very clearly defined and streamlined in practice. Some of these concerns include a discomfort with the term "licensure" itself for some partners, and potential confusion with AOE's role with existing educator licensure.
3. **Third, partners consistently raise the issue of capacity and supports.** Moving toward higher and more formalized expectations only works if higher education capacity, advising and navigation, financial supports, and compensation pathways are sufficiently scaled and accessible across the state. Otherwise, even well-intended standards can become barriers rather than ladders.
4. **Finally, there is a strong and reasonable focus on financing and timing.** We hear concerns about mandates without resources, about whether compensation will keep pace with expectations, and about how quickly the system can realistically absorb multiple major changes at once while still protecting access and stability.

Taken together, these are not arguments against the goals of this proposal. They are signals that success will depend heavily on sequencing, resourcing, and implementation design.

Closing

Act 76 has fundamentally changed Vermont's early childhood system. The state is now serving more families, investing more public dollars, and operating a system that is larger, more impactful, and more dependent on careful coordination than it was before.

The question before you is not simply whether licensure is a good idea. It is how to ensure that any major workforce reform strengthens, rather than destabilizes, the system Vermont is still actively building.

BBF deeply appreciates the committee's leadership on these issues and stands ready to support your work with continued monitoring, data, and system-level advisement.