

Thank you, Madame Chair, and to the members of this committee, for the chance to share my story. My name is Shannon Edmonds-Folsom, and I am a resident of Newport City, Vermont. I have been working at Jay Peak since 2013, starting in Ski and Ride School. My time there ultimately led me to a career in early childhood education, since the snow kept melting, and I really needed a year-round job. I earned a Master's Degree in Early Ed from Champlain College, achieved my PreK Teaching License, and joined the Child Care Department at Jay Peak Resort as a teacher in 2018. Now I am the Child Care Manager. I have served in that role since April 1st, 2022. I know, it's a weird day to get a promotion.

My responsibilities include recruiting and retaining qualified staff, ensuring compliance with child care licensing regulations, and coordinating both recurring and non-recurring child care services for the resort. Our employee and local resident center operates year-round, serving children 6 weeks to 5 years old. We also offer an Act 166 UPK early learning program. This is what we call "recurring care:" We see these families every day and serve them for multiple years, even multiple siblings. For "non-recurring" or resort guest drop-in care, we have an additional licensed space within our Ski and Ride school building, which I operate mid-December through the end of March every ski season. This space serves children 0-4 years old. As of this writing, I have sent out 146 enrollment packets for the 2026 season. Furthermore, when my year-round program is fully staffed, I have 23 spaces for infants, toddlers, and PreK children, that I can offer to employees and local residents. Our department has the opportunity to touch the lives of very many, very little people, and my team and I take that seriously.

There's a lot to know when you work with these little people. For example, it's completely developmentally appropriate for toddlers to enter a state of conflict every 20 minutes. That's three times an hour, every hour. Also, as much as 90% of the human brain develops by age 3; and that in 2010, it was estimated that young children spent approximately twelve thousand hours in group care and institutional settings before they went to school. Early childhood educators make those twelve thousand hours meaningful, enriching, and full of play, love, and connection, so that brain that's growing so rapidly from 0-3 is nurtured with language, art, music, relationships, and so much more. This helps set the foundation for a young person equipped with self-regulation and a grounded sense of self and community.

As a center director, I get to invite new people into this amazing career, and provide a valuable service to our local community and our guests. When I was interviewed in the fall of 2025 by First Children's Finance, I said that offering child care wasn't a luxury, it was an investment in our entire region. I meant that. Child care allows our local community to get to work. And a good number of jobs in our region are connected to the ski resort industry, which contributes to our state's economy. Jay Peak Resort employs, on average, 550 people year round. We also experience huge influxes of seasonal employees—and those folks need child care, too.

And yet, there remain huge barriers to recruiting and retaining a quality work force in early childhood education. This is where the licensure process envisioned in S.206 comes into play. Licensure provides a clear pathway for a career with longevity and value. It

creates workforce retention, which improves access to child care for families. Think of it this way—I can have my driver's license and drive my own kid to school. I can even help drive my neighbor's kid's to school. But I definitely need a CDL before I drive the whole school bus.

This is where you folks come in. You have the opportunity to help minimize these barriers. Please carefully consider how licensure for early childhood educators and home providers could help evolve this profession. We deserve a career with respect, longevity, value, and fair compensation for our unique skill set and knowledge. I'd love a better hiring pitch than, "We don't do this for money or respect, but we have a lot of fun playing all day." If nothing else, become champions of the educators that work in *child care*. If we worked in "day care," we would do this: [model staring at a watch for a few moments.] "Okay team, that was a great 10 hours, see you tomorrow." No, we work in child care. We teach children, support families, honor their messy and lovable lives, and we do it with our whole hearts.

Madame Chair, fellow senators, thank you all again for your time and your consideration of my story. If there is anything further I can offer, I am at your service.

Shannon Edmonds-Folsom | Child Care Manager
Jay Peak Resort
830 Jay Peak Rd
Jay, VT 05859