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BEFORE THE VERMONT HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
ON

"S. 206 - An act relating to licensure of early childhood educators by the Office of
Professional Regulation"
April 30, 2026

Good morning. My name is Caitlin McLean, and I am the Director of Multistate and International Programs at the [Center for the Study of Child Care Employment](https://cscce.berkeley.edu) at the University of California, Berkeley. Our research center at UC-Berkeley has studied issues central to the preparation, support, and compensation of early childhood educators across the nation for over 25 years.

Thank you, Chairwoman Wood, and members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak with you today about S.206. The purpose of my testimony is to provide information about how Vermont's S.206 bill fits within the broader context of efforts to professionalize the ECE field across the country.

Recent efforts to advance early childhood educator qualifications

In 2015, a group of leading experts advising the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine published a consensus study report called [*Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*](#).¹ This seminal report summarized the latest science of child development and early learning and developed a series of recommendations for developing a workforce of early childhood educators who are necessary to deliver high-quality early learning experiences for children birth through age eight. Critically, this report recognized that:

- Young children’s health, development, and early learning experiences provide the foundation for later learning and lifelong success.
- The work of providing early care and education is important and complex, and therefore the adults engaged in providing these services must be properly prepared and supported.
- The fragmented system of early care and education in the U.S. does not sufficiently or consistently acknowledge early childhood educators as a unified workforce with a common knowledge base or support the necessary preparation and skill development for such a crucial workforce.

The consensus report recommended greater coherence in qualification requirements, credentialing, and licensure, and, over time, to transition to a minimum expectation of a bachelor’s degree for lead educators working with young children from birth to age eight. The explicit purpose of these and other recommendations of the report are to bring the preparation of early childhood educators more in line with the science of child development.

This transformative vision contrasts sharply with the current legacy of the U.S. early childhood system that has arisen over many decades and is rooted in biases against and exploitation of women and people of color.² The current system continues to undervalue and undermine the essential work of early childhood educators due to misguided and outdated assumptions about the skills needed to work with young children. As a result, many early childhood educators today face a lack of respect, low wages, and pervasive economic insecurity, and programs struggle to recruit and retain staff.³

Recognizing that we cannot continue with the current, exploitative system — a system that does not work for children, for parents, or for early childhood educators — many national and state leaders within the field of early care and education have been working toward that transformative vision outlined by the National Academies a decade ago.

- A national collaborative, led by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), established a [Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession](#), which outlined three professional designations — Early Childhood Educator (ECE) I, Early Childhood Educator (ECE) II, and Early Childhood Educator (ECE) III, each with an associated scope of practice, expected level of professional preparation, and expected level of mastery of the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators. An individual professional license at each of these levels would formally recognize these levels of professional mastery. The intention is to simplify and align professional pathways within the early care and education field, which to date have been fragmented and

confusing for those within and beyond the ECE field. This effort has built on decades of work to establish clear and uniform standards for working with young children.

- States like California and Louisiana have already taken their own steps toward issuing permits or certificates to recognize early childhood educators' skills and competencies and to authorize them to practice.⁴
 - In California, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, which oversees the state's teacher certification and licensure system for public school teachers, also issues [Child Development Permits](#), which are required to teach in publicly-funded early care and education programs.
 - Similarly, Louisiana's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, which oversees the state's teacher certification and licensure system for public school teachers, also oversees the [Ancillary Early Childhood Certificate](#), which is required of lead teachers in publicly-funded early care and education programs.
- Crucially, many states have increased their investments in developing a pipeline of qualified educators by providing necessary financial supports:
 - Scholarship programs, such as the nationally renowned [T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program](#) currently in 20+ states, including Vermont, helps prepare current and future early childhood educators, while avoiding student loan debt that can drive educators out of the field. With such low wages currently, national recommendations are clear that early childhood educators should not be expected to shoulder the costs of developing specific knowledge and skills to facilitate learning among young children.
 - Increasing numbers of states, like Vermont, are also investing in [apprenticeship programs](#) to provide classroom-based instruction.

Due to these long-running efforts, the current ECE workforce is not starting from scratch. Nationally, the majority of early childhood educators have a college degree and are highly knowledgeable about their craft.⁵ These patterns are similar in Vermont, where 58% of staff with verified credentials have a college degree at the associate's level or higher, according to a recent report by the Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division.⁶

The role of individual licensure

The most important aspect of high-quality early care and education is the educator and their practices, yet the current ECE regulatory system continues to prioritize regulation of the facility rather than the practice of the individual teacher. This is in contrast to other professions, especially those working with vulnerable populations such as nurses and paramedics, which require individuals to hold a license demonstrating they meet minimum

standards necessary for their role. As a result of this lack of attention to individual licensure or certification, licenses for child care sites often specify increasingly minute and detailed requirements related to physical space, materials, and other aspects of an ECE program, with a high degree of required documentation, some of which could potentially be reduced or streamlined once early childhood educators are individually licensed and trusted to follow the best practices of their profession.^{7,8}

Recommendations

Vermont now has the opportunity to build on Act 76, its nationally-renowned public investment in early care and education, and take the next step toward a system in which early childhood educators are seen, valued, and respected as a critical profession.

As new qualification requirements are enacted, it's important to:^{9,10}

- Develop an intentional strategy to provide dual support to the incoming workforce while also supporting the existing workforce to meet requirements.
 - Supports that have worked in various communities to date include:
 - Cohort models;
 - Classes in community locations;
 - Flexible class schedules (nights, weekends);
 - ECE-specific advising and academic counseling;
 - Apprenticeship models combining work, education, and increases in wages; and
 - Comprehensive scholarships (i.e., covering tuition, fees, books, technology, etc.).
- Ensure that all members of the current and future workforce have opportunities and support to acquire education and training at no personal financial cost.
 - Partner with educators to identify pathways and conditions that reflect their aspirations and needs.
- Identify systemic barriers and develop equity-driven solutions to facilitate access and create the conditions for educators to successfully advance.
 - Design and fund specific strategies to facilitate the attainment of associate and bachelor's degrees among historically oppressed racial and ethnic groups as well as individuals who speak English as a second language.
 - Regularly collect and review data about scholarship programs and other educational initiatives to identify disparities in access and to assess whether such programs are providing adequate levels of support.

Providing debt-free access to education is necessary but not sufficient. Ensuring adequate public funding for programs to increase the wages of early educators and improve their

working conditions is critical to ensure educators are attracted to this work now and in the future, and that current educators can stay in their jobs.¹¹ States like [Minnesota](#) and [Illinois](#) and localities like the [District of Columbia](#) provide regular payments to programs with the explicit purpose of improving compensation in ECE.

Without sustained attention to the needs of early childhood educators, including their preparation as well as their working conditions, ACT 76 and other important efforts to sustain a high-quality early care and education system in Vermont and elsewhere, will founder.

All change, even good change, is difficult. But change is necessary if we want a better future for our kids and families. Vermont is well situated to make meaningful change to deliver on the promise that quality early care and education holds for children, their families, and our communities, with early childhood educators central to that vision.

Thank you very much for your attention to this important issue. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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Biography

Dr. Caitlin McLean is an expert on the U.S. early care and education system and its workforce. She is Director of Multistate and International Programs at the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) at the University of California-Berkeley, where she leads cross-state early care and education (ECE) workforce policy projects. These include the biennial Early Childhood Workforce Index and related research on ECE compensation initiatives and workforce data. Dr. McLean also provides and oversees technical assistance to state-level stakeholders looking to improve their policies to prepare, support, and compensate early educators. Prior to joining CSCCE in 2015, Dr. McLean's research focused on comparative early care and education policy in the United States and Europe, with a special emphasis on the United Kingdom. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Political Science and International Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her M.S. in International and European Politics as well as her Ph.D. in Social Policy from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.