



DELIVERING ON THE PROMISE OF ACT 76

Ensuring an Equitable, Affordable, and Sustainable Early Childhood Education System in Vermont

Overview

Since Act 76 passed, Vermont has made significant, measurable progress towards solving our state's child care crisis. Public investments have already made our state more affordable for families and businesses by bringing down the cost of child care for thousands of Vermonters - allowing parents to work and businesses to hire and retain the employees they need. However, we have much more work to do to reach the goals the Legislature has laid out:

- All Vermont families who need it have access to affordable, quality child care.
- Families spend no more than 10% of their household income on child care.
- Every child has access to skilled, well-prepared, and professionally compensated early childhood educators.

Through Act 76, the Vermont Legislature made a promise that we would fix our broken child care system, make child care more accessible and affordable, and grow our economy. We've made real progress, but we're far from finished – and we owe it to Vermonters to get this right. We must continue to increase access, lower costs, and create a clear, professional pathway for our early childhood educators.

Legislative Update

SFY 2026 Budget

When Act 76 was passed, it was intentionally funded through two crucial funding streams:

- Approximately \$50 million in General Funds for CCFAP and Quality and Capacity Incentives. This was intended to be ongoing, base funding, and this is the funding the Governor is proposing to cut.
- Revenue from the newly created Child Care Contribution (payroll tax), which was directed into the Child Care Contribution Special Fund and statutorily set aside for CCFAP. Original estimates for this fund were about \$82 million annually.

The Governor's proposed budget for State Fiscal Year 2026 (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026) recommends permanently reallocating \$19 million that was raised in Act 76 for child care and putting it toward other unrelated budget needs. These are the funds that you fought for in 2023 and now, if lawmakers go along with this proposal, it would go back on the commitment that was made to Vermonters and jeopardize the progress we've made. We are just beginning to turn a corner, to stabilize and expand our child care sector so that it can actually meet the needs of Vermonters. This is the time to build on the progress from Act 76 – not cut back on a solution that's working.

Both the House Human Services and House Commerce & Economic Development Committees have submitted memos to the House Appropriations Committee about the FY26 budget, and they recommended rejecting the Governor's proposed reduction to base child care funding. Human Services is also recommending an increase in reimbursement rates for infants and toddlers receiving tuition assistance through the Child Care Financial Assistance Program, as well as additional support for early childhood education workforce development programs. The Appropriations Committee is currently considering these requests. Appropriations will finalize their FY26 Budget proposal by Friday March 21 – this is a great time for them to hear from you!

Establishing Early Childhood Education as a Profession

In 2024, the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children submitted a request to the Vermont Office of Professional Regulation (OPR) on behalf of thousands of early childhood educators who participated in Vermont's Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession initiative requesting that the office conduct a Sunrise Review to assess whether early childhood education should become a recognized profession in Vermont. In January, OPR released their Sunrise Review report to the legislature, recommending professional recognition for early childhood educators in line with the national early childhood educator license to practice designations of ECE I, II, and III. OPR has been working with legislators to turn their recommendations, which align with VTAEYC's recommendations, into a bill. In the House, the bill number is H. 182. The Senate will introduce a companion bill this week.

Our Asks

We want to ensure that all Vermont families have access to quality, affordable child care and that our early childhood educators are well-compensated and well-supported. Act 76 started us on the right path, but there's more work to do, which is why now is not the time to take critical funding away from child care.

This is the time to build on that progress – not cut back on a solution that's working. Vermont needs to use every dollar allocated under Act 76 for its intended purpose: solving Vermont's child care crisis.

Please **thank members of the House Human Services and Commerce and Economic Development Committees** for their recommendations to the Appropriations Committee. And **ask all legislators to follow those recommendations and reject the Governor's proposed cuts to base funding for child care.** Ask them to instead invest the funds to grow and strengthen the early childhood education workforce, grow child care capacity, and support more families to access quality child care.

Please also **ask members of the House and Senate Government Operations Committees to take up the Senate bill to establish early childhood education as a licensed profession**, in line with recommendations from the Office of Professional Recognition and early childhood educators around the state.

Sharing Your Story Worksheet

This worksheet can help you figure out what you want to say to legislators during your lunch or afternoon conversations with Legislators.

5 Points to Include in Your Story

1. **Who are you?**

This includes your name and where you live. You can also include information about a role you hold (i.e. being a parent of a young child, working in early childhood education, etc.).

2. **What do you care about?**

See the Talking Points section of this toolkit to help you pick a topic to discuss with legislators.

3. **Why do you care about this issue?**

Persuasive stories include elements of the “heart”—values, feelings and emotions—and elements of the “head”—rationale, analysis and strategy. Combining your personal story with factual information and statistics can be a powerful way to motivate others to take action. Why do you care about this cause? What is the need that you would like the Legislature to address?

4. **What do you want?**

Have an ask for legislators. What do you want? (Some ideas for this section include, “Please support recognizing early childhood education as a profession,” or “Please protect child care funding and continue to invest in our children, our families, and our early childhood educators.”)

5. **Say thank you.**

At the end of sharing your story with your legislator(s), be sure to thank them for their time and consideration.

Steps to Develop Your Story

1. Think about it and write it down.

Using the 5 Points (above), write down your initial ideas on what you want to share with legislators.

2. Practice!

Try reading your story out loud to yourself. Remember, to be clear and concise; you might need to revise your story a few times to make sure you can share it quickly.

3. Practice again!

Find a partner at your table and practice reading your story to them to gather feedback on how to make your story even stronger.

Tips and Tricks for Sharing Your Story

- Do not make negative remarks about the Governor, legislators, or other community members who may disagree with you.
- It's OK to read from your written story during lunch table conversations. Just be sure to look up every now and then to make eye contact with legislator(s).
- Be mindful of your time. There will likely be several people at your lunch table, and everyone needs a turn to share their asks.
- Try to avoid fillers like um, uh, ah, or er.
- Take a deep, slow breath if you realize you're speaking quickly or if you're feeling really nervous. You've got this!

Talking Points

Protecting Child Care Funding

- The revenue from the Child Care Contribution this year is projected to be \$19 million higher than original estimates. We want lawmakers to use this funding to further expand child care capacity and grow our early childhood educator workforce, so that all Vermont families who need child care have access to it.
- Less funding for child care would be detrimental to the progress we've made so far and would negatively impact Vermont's early childhood education workforce, child care programs, and our youngest children.
- We are just beginning to turn a corner, to stabilize and expand our child care system so that it can actually meet the needs of Vermonters. This is the time to build on that progress – not cut back on a solution that's working.

Establishing Early Childhood Education as a Profession

- Our goal is to create an early childhood education profession where each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality, affordable early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce.
- Professional recognition creates a sustainable, accessible, transparent system that centers quality and equity, and that works for everyone: children and families, early childhood educators, hiring program directors, and the public.
- **The number one indicator of quality in a young child's early experiences is the qualifications of the educator who spends their days with them.** That means the best outcomes for children come from investment *in early childhood educators themselves*. Regulation and recognition with individual licenses to practice demonstrates accountability, which is necessary to finally get public investment for early childhood education as a public good.
- **More than 1,000 members of our workforce participated in shaping our vision.** Our recommendations were created by a task force of early childhood educators who are experienced with the requirements of the current system. They listened to the workforce's input about what and who an ECE profession includes, and what supports are needed for it to work.
- All educators should get similar recognition and compensation, whether they work at home, in a center, in a Head Start program, or public school. This work builds on changes that started in Act 76, which increased CCFAP reimbursements, and started to address the gap between payments to centers and family home child care programs. It's another step toward equity and valuing our work.