

Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality Affordable Child Care Testimony Received

Compiled August 15, 2016

Hi Charlotte and Jessica,

I hope your meeting went well last night. I know the BRC doesn't meet again until July but I'd love to submit my thoughts now. I know the BRC's purpose is 1.) to review reports relating to high quality, affordable child care, 2.) to determine the essential elements essential in quality child care programs; and 3.) to make recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor on the best way to use public funding. I'm sure the BRC has reviewed the Stalled at the Start report released by Let's Grow Kids and therefore think it relevant to share some concerns I have with the report regarding its accuracy and the impact it's had on child care providers and the public.

1.) The report claims, without adequate grounds, that Vermont is experiencing a crisis in regards to the availability of high-quality child care. Participation in STARS is optional and there is no application process for legally exempt providers to participate making STARS an extremely incomplete tool of measurement. There could be a crisis regarding the availability of high-quality child care but we currently have no way to measure that.

2.) The report's assumptions that high-quality child care is limited to those choosing to earn 4 and 5 stars is contrary to the STARS program's own statements to providers. Participating providers are told that every star is an indication of going above and beyond standard regulations. STARS sends providers who've chosen to get one, two, three, four and five stars a Certificate of Achievement suggesting it should be hung proudly for families and children to see. It seems completely inappropriate for Let's Grow Kids to step in and declare the majority of the programs across the state to be not "high-quality" simply because they haven't chosen to get 4 or 5 *optional* stars or in the legally exempt provider's case *haven't even been able to participate* in STARS.

3.) The Stalled at the Start report itself and the many times Let's Grow Kids has referenced it on WCAX, WDEV, VPR, VTDigger, Facebook, Twitter, etc. seems to defame providers with zero, one, two, or three stars. Not only does the report clearly imply that these providers do a *not* high-quality job but it goes another step and lists them as a contributing factor in "stalling" or being a "hazard" regarding the education and development of the children in their care.

4.) The report misrepresents the availability of child care to the public by completely leaving out legally exempt providers. The report also misrepresents the situation regarding high-quality care to the public by suggesting that by choosing a provider with anything less than 4 or 5 stars parents are putting their child in a "hazard" or "stalled" situation.

Thank you for reading. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,
Aubrey Boyles

Hi,

I was unable to attend the recent forums held by the Blue Ribbon Commission, however I do care a lot about the work that is being done and would love to be involved in these conversations.

I am a EEE teacher and I have worked in childcare centers in the past. I am also a new parent and recently completed a search to secure childcare for my own child. So, I have seen the challenges from a number of perspectives. I absolutely agree that childcare is incredibly expensive, both for the parents whose children attend programs, and for the programs themselves to operate. At the same time, childcare workers do not make a livable wage. I appreciate the work that is being done on all of these fronts.

Of course I do not have an easy solution, but I have a few thoughts on possible long term goals:

- I think one thing that could have a huge positive impact on early childhood care would be for the state to guarantee and provide long term parental leave in the early year(s) of a child's live. The infant and toddler years are the most costly times for childcare, as they require higher ratios of teachers to children. If parents were financially able to spend this time with their children, it would eliminate much of the need for childcare at the youngest age. This would allow childcare centers to reduce their operating costs as well.

- The new universal pre-k law (Act 166) is a wonderful step towards providing high quality educational opportunities for Vermont's 3- and 4-year-olds. However, 10 hours a week is not sufficient for most working families, and in many cases it may be challenging for parents to piece together a schedule that allows their child to attend a pre-k program and also have childcare for the remainder of the parents' working hours. Over time, I would hope that the state could increase the number of public pre-k hours available and/or help to create a more seamless system of early education and care.

Thank you for the important work you are doing, and please continue to elicit information from the public.

Thank you,
Becca Hohn



As a mother and a former child care worker, I have personally experienced again and again the positive impact of skilled care in influencing the development of young lives. The proper teaching at the right time can make the difference between a person who can function in society and a person who has life long struggles without hope of understanding or major change. I hope and pray that early childhood funding will get the funding it needs to help our little ones grow into useful productive adults



Hi Jessica,

I am a mother of 2 daughters, ages 6 and 3. Both started in center-based child care as infants. One is now in public school and the other attends a 3 star preschool full-time.

When I was pregnant with my first, there were only 2 options for infant care in my community — viable options for a mother who needed to return to work in 12 months, that is. I picked the better of the two, and was then locked into that center for the next 6 years, even as it experienced ups and downs, because it would have been insanity to move my older daughter to another center when I still needed infant care for my younger daughter.

I hate the fact that, at the most expensive point in the process, my total day care bill for both girls was over \$20,000 a year! And yet the teachers at the center didn't make a livable wage.

I hate the fact that our center has to do lame fundraisers like asking parents to sell kettle corn in order to cover their costs. My husband and I work full-time and are frazzled and harried at the end of the day. IT is an effort just to find time for a family dinner, and reading to our kids, and taking care of chores and family business. I write a four-figure check to our day care every month, and I still have to ask my friends to buy \$10 bags of kettle corn to support them? I'm not blaming the center — I'm mad at the fact that they need to do this.

I'm really angry about the misrepresentation of the Stars system in the media recently. Several years ago, my daughter's center was downgraded from 4 to 3 stars. Of course, as a parent I was horrified to think that my daughter was suddenly at a 'subpar' facility. I went online and researched the components of Stars. When I read the details, I realized that this rating system — while clearly important from a state regulatory perspective — had very little relationship with 'quality' as I experienced it as a parent. I feel liberated by the knowledge that a center's 'stars' rating was, in my view, NOT a reliable indicator of whether a child could have a good experience there. I felt empowered to trust my own experience — and my own criteria. So I have been so frustrated by the sound bites that have been used in recent campaigns about how only 4 and 5 star centers are 'high quality.' That is not accurate and also not helpful.

—The STARS system, in my view, has relatively few measures that actually reflect the classroom experience. Lots of regulatory stuff, policy stuff, rules and admin-y stuff. Lots of 'extras' like whether there;s an annual family event or not. Not a lot that correlates directly to the things I as a parent use to assess the quality of the actual classroom experience.

—We should be measuring teachers on actual performance more than educational attainment. Good early ed teachers need to demonstrate all sorts of skills that you don't acquire by going to school. Patience. Empathy. A sense of humor. In my 6 years of sending my kiddos to day care, 2 of the *worst* teachers I've experienced have had postsecondary degrees. Some of the *best* teachers I've experienced have had only a CDA. Interestingly, I've found that whether or not a provider has kids herself tends to correlate better with her skill as a provider than her educational background.

--There have been times in my experience where my and my husband's sanity has been a critical factor for us — more so than whether the experience was 'optimal' for our daughters. And I'm okay with that. We are our daughters' most important care givers. If we make ourselves crazy and miserable in order to ensure that our children are going to the 'very best' preschool available—are they necessarily better off than if we opt for a pretty good preschool that makes our lives a little less harried and a little more sane? I say no. Goodness of fit for our whole family was far more important than ensuring our child was at a 4 star center rather than a 3 star one.

The state needs to ensure that child care providers adhere to certain standards. Yes. And STARS may be good for that.

But QUALITY is something different. Quality can mean different things for different families and for different kids. Different families have different needs. Different children may do better in different environments. One child may have a high quality experience at a place that is a terrible fit for another child. Parents need to know what characteristics are associated with high quality and need to be empowered to make the choice that is right for their own needs. I think this poster from the NAEYC is great in terms of emphasizing actual classroom practice and experience.

<http://families.naeyc.org/infographic/what-look-preschool-program>

I hope that we in Vermont can find a way to better value this important work — to pay providers what they are worth and to help give families better choices and more opportunity to choose a provider that is a good fit for their own family.

Thanks for your consideration,

Gretchen Elias

My name is Holly Morehouse. I'm a Burlington resident, a working mom, and the Executive Director of Vermont Afterschool. Thank you for holding these public forums.

I'd like to ask the Commission to include in your report a section outlining the need for high-quality child care beyond age 5, in particular for school age children during the afterschool hours and over the summer. Ten years ago when my son turned 5, I was under the misconception that as soon as he started elementary school, my childcare woes and worries would be over. To say that was a serious miscalculation is an understatement. In fact, in many ways the logistical challenges around quality child care became even greater.

I now had to worry about transportation and transitions between school and afterschool. I had to find intermittent care for teacher inservice days, school vacation weeks, and snow days. I had to think about before-school coverage when I needed to be at work early. And then there is summer.... 10 weeks where camps, programs, and care have to be found, coordinated, and paid for. I saved all year to cover the cost of summer programs and still had weeks of care to fill in other ways. And we have been fortunate. For many families, child care in the afterschool and summer hours is cobbled together and incomplete due to a lack of options in their community for school age children, as well as stretched and constrained family budgets.

Please consider the following points about the need for child care beyond the age of five:

- (1) Over 79% of Vermont children (ages 5-17) have all available parents in the work force. For working families there is often a gap of 15-25 hours per week when parents are working and children are out of school. This gap is even bigger during the summer months and school vacation weeks.
- (2) Studies have shown that where at-risk students fall behind is not in the classroom but outside the school day and over the summer. In fact, up to 2/3 of the academic achievement gap can be attributed to differences in summer learning opportunities that occur beyond the age of 5 and that continue throughout the elementary school years.
- (3) In many schools, lunch is served at 11:30am or even earlier. The snacks and suppers provided during an afterschool program may be the only healthy food a child has access to until the next day. In summer, access to food is even more important.
- (4) Finally, the afterschool hours of 3-6pm are the peak hours for children and youth to engage in risky behaviors, experiment with alcohol and drugs, and commit crimes or be victims of crime. Right at the age where families try to save on childcare costs by having their 8, 10, or 12-year old stay home alone or perhaps even care for younger siblings, these risk factors are increasing.

We know that more than 22,000 children and youth in Vermont would participate in afterschool and summer programs if more were available in their community. A 2014 report also found that Vermont has the lowest rate of low-income children participating in afterschool programs in the nation. We have a responsibility as a state to invest in our kids to ensure that everyone has opportunities for success.

I appreciate the Commission's focus on quality child care and very much hope that your report includes and acknowledges the need for high-quality childcare for school age children in Vermont, particularly during the afterschool hours and over the summer. Only by also acknowledging the need for high-quality childcare for school age children, will the Commission's report be complete and accurately represent the childcare needs and concerns of Vermont's working families. Thank you.

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Hello Jessica-

My name is Jackie Kempton and I am the mother of two girls, living in Peacham, VT. I wanted to share with you my story about child care in hopes that this would better inform the state about the issues that Vermonters are facing with affordable childcare.

For the greater part of 2012, I was pregnant with my first daughter, Chloe Ann, born in October. Being a first time Mom, and working full time, I had just assumed that I would return to work once my maternity leave was up in December. I had saved as much vacation time as possible so I could spend more time with my daughter after maternity leave. My husband, William, is a 3rd generation dairy farmer in Peacham, VT. Chloe would be the first grandchild for his and my parents. For the duration of my pregnancy, I was working full time in the accounting department for Cabot Creamery. I loved working and earning a wage to contribute to our combined income. It never crossed my mind that child care would be an issue when Chloe was born. Around the

third trimester, I decided that we needed to start researching daycares. A lot of moms had told me that if I was going to put my baby in daycare, a lot of the state registered ones weren't accepting infants, slots were already filled.

I started out by going to the state website. I was surprised at first to not find very many daycares in a close vicinity to my home. I thought to myself, "okay, I'll have to travel some, but we'll make it work." We found 2 home daycares that were state registered in the next town over. I made some phone calls and decided to tour them when my daughter was born. I also decided to just "drop in" to see what a normal day would be without them knowing I was coming for a visit.

I wasn't overly surprised at the situation and I felt comfortable with my daughter at a particular home daycare in Danville, VT. We then discussed price. Both my husband and I are college educated adults. We both worked 40-50+ hours a week to make a livable wage in Vermont. When we sat down to budget everything, we figured that if I went back to work, it would be for the benefits only. The majority of my paycheck would cover the cost of the daycare...for one child. We couldn't believe it. How is this possible? Why would I work, to have someone else raise my child, just so we could have health insurance? How is this fair? How is this right?!

December arrived and William and I decided that if my whole paycheck was going to go to daycare, that I should just stay home, raise my daughter and he would take us on his health insurance...thankfully. I never have once regretted that decision. My daughter will be 4 in October and we have a 1 year old now as well. I plan to stay home with my second daughter until she goes to preschool.

I guess what I would like to convey is that some days, I wake up and feel like I'm not living up to my potential. I could be more "comfortable" and contributing financially to our household, but the resources in the state of Vermont don't make that feasibly possible. I wouldn't go back and change my decision to be a stay at home mom, but I surely did not expect to have so much stress and worry about childcare, when I should have been focusing on the most important milestone of my life--the birth of my first daughter.

I hope that someday, childcare providers can be compensated much more than they are now, because they deserve it. Writing this as a mother who had earned \$0 for the past 4 years...the childcare issue needs to be fixed.

Thank you for reading this and I hope the meeting goes well on Monday.

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Hi Jessica,

I won't be able to make the forum meetings – is there is a way to submit in writing?

My child goes to Otter Creek Child Center in Middlebury and it is WONDERFUL! Those teachers need to make more money and at the same time the cost per child per month is so high. I work in addiction medicine and I can say research is showing that healthy supports and interventions at a young age make a huge impact. I'd rather see more grants for childcare than college. Starting out with good supports, social skills and education makes all the rest of growing up more manageable.

Thanks,
Jessi

I would be happy to give you my opinion on how I see the crisis in the child care industry. I think my feelings are pretty much in line with others' thoughts.

- The child care financial assistance (subsidy) rates are not high enough to support the parent co-pays. This creates issues for parents who are struggling financially. It also adds to parents making selections of lesser quality programs (including Legally Exempt Child Care providers) since the rates are cheaper.
- Low wages and minimal (at best) fringe benefits create continuous teacher turnover.
- The high cost to provide infant-toddler care and parents' inability to pay the co-pay keep the number of Early Care slots at a minimum
- Increased credentialing and training requirements through Child Care Licensing Regulations discourage providers (particularly home providers) from wanting to remain (or start) in the business.
- The fingerprinting process will add a level of frustration for programs although I totally agree with adding it to the licensing regulations.
- There is a lack of adequate staff training to deal with the increased number of intense behaviors which causes burnout.
- There is no additional state funding to support hiring additional child care licensors. Programs need to be visited more frequently to ensure compliance, and the current licensor case load is too high.
- Wages in general are not in line with the high cost of living in Vermont.
- Although there is a rise in programs participating in Vermont's STARS quality program, providers are getting "stuck" due to the requirements of the credentialing arena.

Our story isn't too different from many stories in Vermont when it comes to finding affordable, but more importantly, quality child care. This is especially true with children newborn to two years of age. That seems to be where the real lack of availability is. Unfortunately this can lead to parents being forced to put their children in daycares that they might not have chosen if they had other options. Needless to say...not a good situation to be in.

Like I started to say...our story probably doesn't differ much from many others. We struggled to find that perfect balance of affordability and quality care. As working parents with decent incomes we are not afforded subsidies like lower income families when it comes to child care. I feel that childcare in Vermont should be affordable for all families regardless of income. I'd also like to see more businesses in Vermont offer childcare as perk or part of salary. These days it's rare that families can afford to have one parent stay home, yet the cost of daycare can sometimes reach an amount so high that it almost makes sense to do just that. However, depending on whose healthcare is used in the family like in our situation, my wife makes less

money, but her health insurance is way better than mine. So, even though it might have made sense for her to stay home...it wouldn't have been affordable due to the loss of healthcare benefits.

Childcare is a true struggle for everyone...I can only hope that when my children have children of their own...they won't have to make these tough choices when it comes to the care of their children.

- Accessing high quality childcare takes years of being on wait lists and there are very few programs that meet the high quality status.
- Childcare is needed in order for both parents to be in the workforce so that we can afford to live a quality life in the Burlington area.
- Few programs have naeyc accreditation and are providing high quality services.
- Teachers aren't paid enough and there are few highly educated teachers who stay in the field because they can't afford to - they need live able wages.
- Staff qualifications also need to be increased
- Funding streams need to change in order to find more dollars into early childhood as early outcomes matter and make a difference
- Families cannot afford to pay the high costs of childcare and are forced to quit jobs and live in poverty in order to have more than one child

Good morning,

I will be unable to attend your childcare forums, but I did want to reach out and give you more information on the types of issues parents and community members are facing. My husband and I work full time, 40+ hours a week, and we try to be involved in our community as much as possible. We are blessed enough to have jobs that allow us to juggle child care responsibilities with work, to a certain extent, but there are times when we both have worked 10+ hour days or weekends to make up for time taken off during the week due to lack of child care.

What would help you the most in respect to accessing high-quality childcare? I have not had a problem with the quality of my son's childcare - the problem has been the availability. My son has stayed with family, stayed with a friend of mine, and now stays in a formerly registered home daycare when he is not in school or with my mother or mother-in-law when the daycare is closed. My son's current provider is not renewing her registration due to the new childcare licensing regulations. I don't believe she is any less qualified than she was a year ago, but she will now not be on a list of registered providers. Some of the reasons she cited were having to install a neon/ electric exit sign over her front door - which is just not practical or aesthetically pleasing in a home - and having to take all of the knives out of her kitchen because she watches children in her home. Her kitchen is on a different floor than where the children spend their time, and they are not upstairs unattended. I would rate her as a high quality childcare provider, but she does not meet the current requirements. I understand that it would be nice to have all our providers have degrees in early childhood education, but what is the incentive for them to spend

thousands on a degree to then make minimum wage and have to do expensive modifications to their homes in order to be registered. Many will just offer care out of their homes and not register, which means the state will now have less of an opportunity to regulate/ help providers than they did before.

What are the responsibilities of Vermont to help ensure all Vermonters have access to high-quality child care? With all due respect, I think the State has put the cart before the horse. There are not enough places for children, and to a certain extent, the quality is not the issue. When a parent has to start searching before the child is even born for a provider, it gets to the point where quality is no longer a question that is asked. As a parent, you could become desperate, especially if you HAVE to work, and at that point you are willing to settle for a child care facility that will keep your child safe and can take him/ her on the days you are working. Convenience and distance are often no longer options you consider - you drive the extra miles or try to switch your hours. You will drive to a different town and attempt to switch your work hours to accommodate the hours of the child care facility, because your alternative is not to work. I think Vermont's responsibility right now should be to increase the number of child care options available to working parents. I know that going into this, the facility might not meet your quality standards, but at least have a grandfathered option so the provider can work on whatever they need to work on over the next few years. I think making the new registration standards start on a certain day with no grandfathering-clause is unrealistic and punitive. Someone who had a playground that up to now was acceptable is now all of a sudden in violation of the new rules. Are you implying the playground was unsafe for the last 10 years it was there? That approach lacks common sense. My point is that Vermont could help with the availability of childcare to start, and with more options, parents will be able to pick the child care providers that are better qualified to address the needs their child has.

What should we do to make accessible, high-quality child care more affordable in Vermont? I honestly do not know. I think we are so far away from being able to do this that I truly can't think of any answers. Perhaps try to increase the availability of grants for child care providers so they can take classes or professional development they need - or they could use the grant money to try to find a substitute to care for the kids while they take time off to take these classes. Without raising the amount of money that people make here, people won't have the money to pay their child care providers. The result is that some of the working families are having fewer kids. I don't believe it is coincidence that the same week the Burlington Free Press started writing articles on the child care issues Vermonters face, they also wrote an article about how our birth rate is the same as it was during the Civil War. Also, the child care providers can't make a living wage. They are self-employed so unless they get health care through a spouse, they are forced to go to the exchange which isn't working well and isn't really that affordable. However, I don't think you can mandate that the child care providers are paid more because those families they serve can't afford to pay them even if you did somehow mandate that child care providers make a living wage - their families are barely making a living wage in some cases themselves.

In closing, I sincerely wish you the best. This is a complex issue that impacts many sectors in Vermont. Some working families will not take children who are in DCF custody into their homes because the children come with no reliable child care, which further stresses DCF as they deal with an increasing number of children coming into custody due to addiction issues in their

families, and puts too much stress on the foster families. Schools are having to absorb what other community based programs can't provide, which increases the stress on schools whose budgets are under increasing scrutiny. There is a LOT of work to be done. I appreciate you both taking your time with these forums as you will most likely hear from many unhappy people - behind their unhappiness is fear that we are not serving our children the best that we can, and that is sad.

Dear Commission:

I applaud and thank you for your efforts in exploring quality child in Vermont. As a working parent of a now 20 and 14 year old, I have experienced the need for affordable, safe, and reliable daycare. For many years I worked odd hours and was fortunate enough to have my children in a family owned home daycare. I also had many available family members to fill in gaps. When my daycare closed and I began to search for a new setting I relied primarily on the word of mouth from trusted friends. I also assumed that if a day cares received state funds for the meals program and held a license that it must be safe and have passed inspections of both its food program, physical setting and overall daycare practice. As my children grew and were able to "report" back to me, I often found this wasn't the case.

I would encourage the Commission to pursue more "surprise" visits for licensed day cares, more reviews of funded food services, more awareness of employees and qualifications. In general, better attention to existing laws would do more to help families gain accesses to quality day care which is already extremely difficult to find. Putting restrictions in place that are unreasonable will only raise costs and make it no longer cost-effective for both parents to work. The opening of pre-schools has already challenged existing daycare to find attendees that can afford programs without scholarships or discounts. This directly impacts their ability to hire staff. I am fearful that if the new laws continue as is, the day care crisis will become similar to the healthcare crisis. our economy and business workforce can not support that kind of crisis.

Let's make sure for our kids sake we continue with your approach in finding out what good day cares are doing right and increase enforcement and education of all those who provide for our children.

Many home daycare begin because mom or dad can't afford to work outside the home. They open their doors and welcome the children of others to share their home. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure their environment is safe. Parents should be vigilant in their observations of both their child's physical and emotional states. They should also be aware of the surroundings. For example, arriving 1 hour earlier than usual may give you an idea as to how nap time is approached. Is there an adult monitoring, is the door locked, is there a sign in or sign out sheet for bathroom breaks or outside play time, does the child come home with projects, or do they have "fire drills?" These are reasonable safety rules. I can see the need for some rules on staffing education. If a permanent part of the staff, a provider should have some training and minimal requirements. However a friend or grandparent or spouse covering for an appointment for a few hours should not, as long as all attendees parents have been notified who and when is covering.

Reasonable, practical, affordable, and enforceable should be the bar we strive to achieve when looking at our day care crisis. Certainly not what the current proposed changes are.

Sincerely ,
Kim Bolduc

Hello, I am writing because I will be unable to attend the public forum on July 25 because I am expecting my second child this week. Therefore, I wanted to reach out to the Committee and offer my thoughts as well as my appreciation for all the hard work the Committee is doing. I believe strongly that this Committee has the power to be solution that so many children, families, and communities need. With that said, I offer responses to the following questions.

1. What would help you the most with respect to accessing high-quality child care? My son is lucky enough to attend a high-quality daycare however it does cause a financial strain our family. With a second child on the way, the impact on our family will be even more significant (approximately \$23,000/year for both children). In addition to the regular daycare fees and fees we pay for basic needs, we separately enroll my son in sports activities (these are not included in his pre-k program) and have separate childcare fees for when his daycare is closed for training, education, in-service, and vacation days.

2. What are the responsibilities of Vermont to help ensure all Vermonters have access to high-quality child care? I believe Vermont has an obligation to ensure all children have access to high-quality child care. I believe its a basic right and need for all children. I also firmly believe that investing in high quality daycare is a beneficial investment for Vermont taxpayers as a majority of brain development happens in the first 3 years of life. Therefore, if children do not receive proper care early on, I believe these children actually end up costing Vermont taxpayers more in the long run because they often need individual, customized plans and caregivers once they enter the school systems. I also believe providing access to high-quality care could help save lives as the rate of abuse against children has drastically increased in recent years in Vermont. I believe more educated, high quality care, early on could be part of the solution of identifying children living in abusive situations so that measures can be taken to stop the cycles of abuse and neglect throughout the State which also have a separate financial impact on Vermont taxpayers.

3. What should we do to make accessible, high quality care more affordable in Vermont? I think the State needs to provide more assistance and regulation over the childcare industry. Specifically, I would like to see the regulations updated to meet current practices, tighter regulation over tuition costs (e.g. if the State issues a credit the daycare shouldn't be allowed to increase the tuition costs by the same amount -- there should be a cap on rate increases and costs), more financial assistance for middle class families and organized support for daycares particularly around expenses. I think the State could leverage partners or systems to help daycares minimize their expenses. For example, a technology solution that would allow daycares to bulk order products through a State wide system of qualified vendors with pricing discounts. This could increase the quality of the products and allow smaller daycares to take advantage of lower pricing thereby cutting their bottom line. I also think Vermont could invest or partner with other organizations to provide a more holistic approach to multiple issues facing the State. For example, Vermont Works for Women offers a Fresh Food Program. The Fresh Food program provides vital on the job-training for women, supports local agriculture and also provides healthy meals at a very reasonable price for children in daycare. As a parent, I would love to reallocate the money and time that I spend buying lunch materials and packing lunches to provide my children with healthy meals that also support on the job training for women.

Thank you for your time,
Kristin Provost

I am a single working parent of one. I recently earned a salary increase by becoming a board certified behavior analyst (BCBA). Unfortunately, because of this salary increase which amounts to about \$96 gross weekly, I lost my childcare subsidy and I am now responsible for paying nearly \$200 a week for my son's care.

The childcare subsidy system needs an overhaul. The CDD base rate falls short of what most full time programs are charging for care.

A DCF market research report from 2010 includes a regional rate comparison for Bennington County on page 4.

	registered home preschool rate		licensed center preschool rate	
	Median	75th percentile	Median	75th percentile
Bennington	134.18	140.00	154.20	180

The current subsidy rate for a full time preschool program (as shown in the most recent Childcare Provider Handbook) doesn't even meet the median rate from 2010! And of course rates have gone up in the past 6 years. I pay \$191.25 a week for a 5-star preschool.

Age Category	Base Rate	1 Star	2 Stars	3 Stars	4 Stars	5 Stars
Preschool	101.83	106.92	112.01	122.19	132.37	142.56

The other problem is that the income guidelines are very low. For a 10% subsidy, a family of three must earn less than \$3,298.00 - I currently earn \$3348/month, so no subsidy for me, which means I pay for more childcare than I do for rent.

Making childcare affordable for working families is a no-brainer. The parents can work and pay taxes, they send their child to day care, the day care provider hires employees who work and pay taxes. Those employees send their children to day care, etc.

So please tell me how you are going to address this problem.

Childcare Provider Handbook

http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/CDD/Brochures/ccfap/Provider_Handbook.pdf

DCF Market Research Report

<http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/CDD/Reports/Market%20Rate%20Survey%20Report%202010%20Final%5B1%5D.pdf>

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Hi –

My name is Mary and I've worked at the same center for almost 30 years. I am currently qualified as an associate teacher. However, with the changes in the new regulations as of September 1st I will need to have additional education to stay in that position. Although I have two years to obtain that training, at my age – I am close to retirement – I do not want to go back to school.

I think that many child care workers and teachers are being forced out of their jobs due to the new regulations. We are caring, nurturing, experienced and have a lot of skills and knowledge about what we do. Just because someone has a degree, they do not necessarily have the experience or ability to effectively work with children.

I feel that those of us with years and years of experience should have the opportunity to obtain additional training OR be grandfathered in with the new regulations. We maintain our CPR and FirstAid training and go to workshops, trainings and in-services for at least 24 hours per year and that should continue to qualify us to be an associate teacher as we are now.

In the end, I think that centers will lose qualified, experienced staff with the new regulations and this will impact the quality of care that children receive.

Thank you.

.....

Greetings,

I'm emailing you to give feedback regarding what I have experienced with childcare/daycare challenges as I am unable to attend the Blue Ribbon Commission public forums.

The issue is access and affordability.

My husband and I both work full time and live in VT. We have insurance and make aprox 100k combined income before taxes. In August we are expecting our first child. I will take 12 weeks maternity leave. He will take 2 weeks. We have all the regular expenses that normal families have: mortgage, car payment, utilities, very little college debt. We've discussed having one of us stay home to save cost, but as my husband makes more than I, and I bring home the insurance, that is not an option. We can't rely on grandparents/ siblings for help with babysitting either.

Affordability: Daycares in our area range from \$750/mo to \$1500 mo for full-time care for an infant over 6 weeks. The low end daycares feel more like babysitting depots where you are simply paying a haggard/ underpaid daycare employee to keep your child alive while you're at work. The higher range daycares seem nicer, cleaner, more organized with more staff and more emphasis on early learning, but they are much more expensive. Some places are more expensive than our mortgage! Some places use a sliding scale to calculate your monthly tuition. This benefits low income families, but not working middle class families like us. Low income families/ parents also benefit from daycare assistance through the state which others can't access. In the end we had to settle for mid-range in-home childcare which we can (barely) afford, but we had to sacrifice some quality in learning. We are not thrilled with our choice.

Accessibility: There are a fair number of daycares in our area. However, everyone has a wait list and you never know which one will become available when you need it. We discovered that many parents (us included) will put their names on every daycares waitlist just in the hopes that one will pan out in time for when they need it....which only makes the wait lists longer.

I wish that daycare/ childcare costs were somehow paid in part or fully by insurance. I don't know of any other solution.

Sincerely,
Sandra

Greetings Jessica,

I was reminded that today is the deadline for public comments to be presented to Blue Ribbon Commission (thank you Hope Campbell). I could not attend the public forum events so will take this moment to mention a stance not new, but worthwhile repeating.

I am a firm believer that by investing monies into early childhood education we have the power to shape our future, not just the future of our children, but the potential landscape of Vermont. By providing trained professionals the safe and stress free environments needed for social emotional development and discovery learning, we are creating an opportunity for success for the youngest members of our communities.

How can "we" expect our providers to create a stress free environment if they themselves are stressed about managing the financials of running such an important dimension of our communities? Schools have school boards advocating on their behalf with the current climate of rules and regulations, an early childhood care center is similar to building a school.

What neuroscience is demonstrating, that by focusing on the youngest years of human development, modeling appropriate responses to stress and emotionally challenging situations, we have an opportunity to build a future with less crime and violence. My vote is to begin transferring monies delegated for the department of corrections towards early childhood care centers. Let's invest money in the future we want to create!

UNTIL THIS HAPPENS...I believe the only way to provide quality childcare that compensates providers with a liveable wage is to turn to the community itself and ask for support. This responsibility should be shared by the state and not rest solely on community members, as not all communities are created equal. If buying cooperatives for fuel and electricity could be created for centers regionally? Or use of an existing state agency to help defer the costs of fingerprinting and back ground checks? These are temporary fixes while I believe the real answer lies in monies being made available on a state level.

Thank you for allowing our voices to be heard.
Respectfully,
Sierra Lowell
