

Testimony of Sonja Raymond

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My name is Sonja Raymond, and I am the owner of Apple Tree Learning Center, a child care program in Lamoille County, and also the Executive Director of the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VAEYC). VAEYC is dedicated to improving the quality of care and education, improving the professional practice of early childhood professionals, and building public understanding and support for high quality early childhood programs.

The business of Early Childhood Care and Education is unique to any other business in that we are a business providing a social service.

- The cost of providing our service falls directly on the backs of families
- Our business is needed by over 70% of Vermont families
- Even with our teachers earning an average of \$15.60 per hour – which is approximately half of what their public school counterparts are making (both having a BA and 7 years of experience) – the cost of our service is generally between 13-40% of our families' income. The exact percentage depends on if they have 1 or 2 children prior to Public Pre-k funding or state subsidy for low income families.

Our teachers are woefully underpaid, but we cannot raise tuition enough to pay more. Parents of both low and middle income levels are already stretched beyond their means.

If the minimum wage is raised to \$15.00 per hour whether it be incrementally over three to four years or all at once, the effects could be devastating for families and providers.

- Families on state subsidy would have much larger co-pays (which they cannot afford) if they even qualified for subsidy at all any longer.
- Families who have no tuition assistance would be priced out of the market and forced to make tough choices about choosing programs that are unregulated or lesser quality.
- Programs could be forced to close infant and toddler programs, further adding to a severe shortage of care for that age group.
- Small centers and home providers with a large population of families receiving subsidy would be devastated as they generally “scholarship” these families further so they can afford the care.

Raising the minimum wage has a trickle-down effect on these childcare businesses.

- We have a pay scale based on position held, years of experience, and credentials (much like a public school pay scale)
- Our lowest paid assistants (those with no college credit) have to earn minimum wage. Therefore there is a trickle effect to all other steps in the pay scale. Based on my current staff of 21 and keeping all things equal, I would have to raise tuition \$39.75 per week per child for a full time slot. We have 95 children a day. This is a 15 % increase, which works out to an additional \$2067 per year per child.

Bottom line: All of this would be unsustainable and potentially devastating to families and early childhood programs.

However, there are programs and initiatives that the state could invest in to help programs and families minimize the impact.

- [WAGES](#) – To help stem the tide of turnover and increase teacher continuity, Child Care WAGES® awards education-based salary supplements to early educators to address the key issues of under-education, poor compensation and high turnover within the early childhood workforce. Supplement awards are based on education achieved and the continuity of care provided.
- Increased investment in CCFAP (increase payments to providers to the current fiscal year market rate and adjust the eligibility)
- [T.E.A.C.H.](#) –T.E.A.C.H. VERMONT is a comprehensive scholarship program that provides the early childhood workforce with access to educational opportunities. It provides to support for those currently in the field needing to attain credentials and degrees.
- Loan Forgiveness programs for those who attained degrees/licenses in the field and cannot afford to work in the field and pay their loans.
- Follow the plan outlined by the [Blue Ribbon Commission](#) to improve access to high quality, affordable child care for all Vermont families who want or need services.