

VERMONT'S 2026 CHILD CARE AGENDA

IMPROVING QUALITY, ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Child care progress is transforming Vermont! Children are entering school better prepared, more parents are able to work, and businesses can hire. Since Act 76 passed in 2023, more than 100 new programs have opened, adding over 1,700 spaces and 400 early childhood educator jobs. But progress is not guaranteed. Families still face high costs, demand still exceeds availability, and we need more qualified early childhood educators. **We must protect the funding driving this success, invest boldly in our ECE workforce, and keep expanding access and lowering costs for families. Vermont's future depends on what we do next.**

Protect ALL Child Care Funding and Keep Act 76 Moving Forward

Act 76 delivers over \$100 million in long-term public investment for Vermont's child care system, and the impact is already changing lives. Lawmakers backed up their commitment last year by ensuring full funding for Act 76 in the future. To continue strengthening child care across the state, policymakers must stay fully committed to the child care funding that is making this transformation possible.

Address Vermont's Fingerprint and Background Check Delays

It's critical for the safety of our kids that ECEs and child care staff take part in efficient and thorough criminal background checks. Currently there is a long backlog for fingerprint and background checks through the Vermont Crime Information Center (VCIC) of more than 35 days. These delays block new educators and support staff from starting work, which makes staffing shortages in child care and afterschool programs even worse.

Strengthen the Early Childhood Educator Workforce

Long-term public investment is helping programs grow and improving the quality of early childhood education. But to meet the needs of families, we need thousands more early childhood educators. By recognizing ECEs as the skilled professionals they are and giving them clear, supported career paths, we make it possible to recruit and retain the workforce the system needs. Vermont educators have been calling for this recognition for years, because better qualifications lead to better outcomes for children.

Increase Access and Affordability

Through Act 76, 5,000 additional children and their families have gained access to child care tuition assistance (CCFAP). But affordable child care is still out of reach for too many. Further investment is needed to continue expanding access, lowering costs, and strengthening quality in our mixed delivery system, especially in rural regions and for families with unique needs such as nonstandard work hours.

2026 POLICY FOCUS

WE'LL WORK WITH LAWMAKERS TO:

Protect Child Care Funding

- Commit to full FY27 child care funding as part of Act 76 and continue the positive momentum we are building for Vermont families, ECEs, and our economy.
- Oppose and defend against attempts to raid child care funding and slow progress.

Strengthen the ECE Workforce

- Support legislation to establish professional recognition for early childhood educators in non-public child care settings, as outlined in the ECE Profession Bill.
- Fully fund scholarships, grants, bonuses, student loan repayment, and adult and youth apprenticeship programs that support and prepare the ECE workforce.

Address Background Check Delays

- Support FY26 BAA and FY27 Budget requests from the Agency of Digital Services (ADS), VCIC, Child Development Division (CDD), Agency of Education (AOE), and related agencies to fund the technology modernization, staffing, and process improvements needed to resolve the fingerprinting and background check backlog.

Increase Access and Affordability

- Continue investing in Vermont's child care system to increase access and bring down costs for families — all while improving quality across the board. To ensure that CCFAP continues to provide tuition assistance to as many Vermont families as possible, the income eligibility cap of 575% of federal poverty level should be expanded.
- Strengthen and expand programs to recruit and retain ECEs so Vermont can continue increasing child care access for children and families.



Vermont Association for the
Education of Young Children

VERMONT'S FUTURE DEPENDS ON OUR STATE HAVING A ROBUST CHILD CARE SYSTEM. LET'S GET TO WORK.

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