

Diverse Supporters of Early Learning Scholarships
Excerpts from Letters in Hearing Packet

“The need for Scholarships is great. We have had waiting lists of more than 700 in recent years in the counties we serve.” **Jon Losness, Families First of Minnesota**

“Early Learning Scholarships 1) create consumer demand to fuel recovery of the devastated child care sector and 2) empower low-income families to access the quality child care programs that help children avoid falling into opportunity and achievement gaps.” **Jan Kruchoski and Fred Senn, Early Care and Education Crisis Work Group**

“Despite the pandemic, 79% of our children 0-5 experienced age-appropriate development toward school readiness in 4 out of 6 domains of development and 90% of these had an Early Learning Scholarship.” **Sondra Samuels, Northside Achievement Zone**

“The Minnesota Business Partnership supports expansion of early learning scholarships to additional low-income families throughout Minnesota. High-quality education programs have been shown to improve school readiness, reduce grade retention and special education, and increase high school graduation rates and college enrollment.” **Amy Walstein, Minnesota Business Partnership**

“47% of scholarships are currently supporting children in Greater Minnesota... We have seen Early Learning Scholarships work across our region. Northeastern Minnesota has the highest participation of licensed child care centers and homes in the Parent Aware System.” **Tony Sertich, Northland Foundation**

“High quality research demonstrates that early learning programs reduce the number of children who are maltreated child maltreatment and the number of families that come to the attention of child protection by as much as 49%. Early learning programs provide support for families to reduce maltreatment as well as safeguards to identify children who are being maltreated.” **Rich Gehrman, Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota**

“...60% of Pathway I scholarship recipients identify as BIPOC and 55% of Pathway I scholarship are awarded to those in a priority category – families experiencing homelessness, child protection or foster care involved, or a minor parent family. In 90% of our kids, within the average time they spend at our shelter (60 days), we see they reach or show growth in one or more of the assessed developmental milestones.” **Rinal Ray, People Serving People**

“As the state re-examines its commitment to addressing our appalling racial disparities, fully funding programs like Early Learning Scholarships and making them accessible to children from families in low-income households beginning at day one needs to be a top priority.” **Bharti Wahi and Debra Fitzpatrick Children’s Defense Fund Minnesota**



March 9, 2021

Dear Members of the House Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee:

Families First of Minnesota oversees Early Learning Scholarships in 28 counties, from southern Minnesota to three counties in the Twin Cities and five counties in northern Minnesota.

The need for Scholarships is great. We have had waiting lists of more than 700 in recent years in the counties we serve. At many times we've only been able to provide scholarships for those who are considered priority:

- Children of a teen parent.
- Currently in foster care.
- In need of child protective services.
- Experienced homelessness in the last 24 months.

We are in support of HF1293 because there is a critical need to increase funding for Early Learning Scholarships so more families can be served. We continue to see a decline in the number of family child care providers in Greater Minnesota, which means more families will face increased costs as they move to child care centers. Without Scholarship funds, some families will be forced to pull one of the parents from the workforce.

Increasing funding for Scholarships can help drive an increase in child care supply, too. If more consumers have the money necessary to purchase care for their children, supply is likely to increase. Providing scholarships for those 35,000 children statewide whose families can't afford high-quality care will likely stimulate growth in the child care industry.

As we come out of this pandemic the demand for child care will increase. We ask you to approve additional funding for Early Learning Scholarships to increase access to those who need it most.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jon Losness".

Jon Losness
Executive Director



children's defense fund minnesota

Dear Members of the House Early Childhood Committee:

As you begin your consideration of HF 1293, we appreciate the opportunity to share our strong support.

Early Learning Scholarships are a vital part of Minnesota's early care and education system, making quality child care available to thousands of children each year. Unfortunately, limited resources and eligibility criteria leave too many children without the critical support needed each year. *HF 1293 has the potential to address both.*

Early Learning Scholarships provide additional options for families, fill important gaps and augment other supports. In over 40 listening sessions conducted by CDF-MN over the past few years, we heard loud and clear about both the value and additional need for Early Learning Scholarships and Child Care Assistance as families struggle to secure the stable, nurturing, culturally appropriate care and education their children need and deserve.

CDF-MN is committed to ensuring every Minnesota child has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. We pay particular attention to those children facing the steepest barriers to success. **As the state re-examines its commitment to addressing our appalling racial disparities, fully funding programs like Early Learning Scholarships and making them accessible to children from families in low-income households beginning at day one needs to be a top priority.**

CDF-MN is pleased to see the Minnesota House seriously considering the real need for wise and significant early care and education resources that are necessary to ensure ***every child*** is given the opportunity to thrive. **We hope you will join us and 72% of Minnesota voters in supporting the significant ongoing investments needed to make quality child care affordable, accessible and relevant to their needs** -- giving children, families and businesses the best chance possible to succeed.

Bharti Wahi
Executive Director

Debra Fitzpatrick
Policy and Legislative Affairs Director



March 10, 2021

The Honorable Dave Pinto
Minnesota House of Representatives
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
503 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: House File 1293 (Kotzya-Witthuhn)

Dear Chair Pinto and Members of the House Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee:

Minnesota students deserve great schools and quality education. However, Minnesota has some of the largest education gaps by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in the nation. Minnesota has struggled for generations to provide quality education to low-income students and students of color, and we must act with greater urgency to address disparities and remove the systemic barriers in education that are a root cause of racial inequity. Starting with the earliest learners, **expanding access to quality early education programs for low-income families is critical to closing education gaps.**

The Minnesota Business Partnership supports expansion of early learning scholarships to additional low-income families throughout Minnesota. High-quality education programs have been shown to improve school readiness, reduce grade retention and special education, and increase high school graduation rates and college enrollment. Expanding early learning scholarships will empower more families to access quality childcare and preschool programs.

The early learning scholarship model is based on research, with independent evaluations that show the model works for families and children. The state has made great strides towards providing scholarships to eligible families, and we need to continue making progress. We recognize the need to focus on low-income children who are eligible for scholarships but remain unable to access a quality learning program, and we recommend reallocation of existing state resources and/or use of applicable federal funds as the first sources of funding to fill these needs.

Thank you for your work on behalf of Minnesota's youngest learners, and we ask that you support the early learning scholarship approach so more low-income families with young children can utilize scholarships to access quality early education programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy Walsten'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Education and Workforce Development Director



2123 West Broadway Avenue #100 | Minneapolis, MN 55411 | 612-521-4405

March 9, 2021

Dear Members of the House Early Childhood Policy and Finance Committee:

Please accept this letter in support of H.F. 1293 / S.F. 705 to increase investment in Early Learning Scholarships.

The Northside Achievement Zone has been working for over a decade to address disparities that contribute to the opportunity gaps in education and quality of life for families impacted by generational poverty. We have worked collaboratively with families, schools and community organizations to create an ecosystem of supports for children and their parents and are convinced that this work must begin prenatally to provide coordinated supports to families over time.

A primary goal of NAZ has been to increase access to quality rated early childhood programs as evidence has shown these programs to be most effective in meeting the developmental needs of children and preparing them for kindergarten. The majority of our families rely on state funded Early Learning Scholarship to provide access to these critical programs and the return on investment continues to show positive results. Despite the pandemic, 79% of our children 0-5 experienced age-appropriate development toward school readiness in 4 out of 6 domains of development and 90% of these children had an Early Learning Scholarship.

Your support of this bill will provide opportunities for thousands of low-income children in our state who otherwise would not be able benefit from quality early learning programs and it will also stabilize the early childhood system which has proven to be essential to our economy and way of life.

Thank you for the opportunity to show our support of this bill.

For our children,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Sondra Samuels', is written in a cursive style.

Sondra Samuels
President & CEO
Northside Achievement Zone

March 9, 2021

Members of the House Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee
In Reference to HF1293

I am pleased to write this letter to express our strong support for increased funding for the Minnesota Early Learning Scholarship Program.

Scholarships are desperately needed. The Northland Foundation supports increased funding for the Minnesota Early Learning Scholarships. As the Region Three Area Administrator of Minnesota Early Learning Scholarships for the seven counties of northeast Minnesota, we are all too aware that more scholarships are urgently needed. As an Area Administrator, we annually have a lengthy wait list of qualifying families with young children for scholarship funding. Approximately 35,000 children, statewide are eligible for scholarships; but due to insufficient state funding cannot get a scholarship.

Scholarships work across Minnesota. As the number of providers who are Parent Aware rated has grown, opportunity to access quality care for young children has increased. Families are now able to access rated programs that can accept scholarships within a reasonable distance to their homes. 47% of scholarships are currently supporting children in Greater Minnesota and 53% in the metro area. We have seen Early Learning Scholarships work across our region.

Scholarships are important incentives for providers who volunteer for ratings. Northeastern Minnesota has the highest participation of licensed child care centers and homes in the Parent Aware rating system. Part of the success rests on honoring providers for their tremendous contributions to our communities. One of those incentives is the opportunity to serve children with Early Learning Scholarships. In fact, a statewide survey of providers showed that the ability to serve Scholarship children was a top reason why providers volunteered for Parent Aware, which ultimately benefits the children in their care.

Please consider supporting increased funding for Minnesota Early Learning Scholarships. This funding is desperately needed for children and families to access quality child care wherever they are living in Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Tony Sertich
President



March 9, 2021

Early Childhood Policy and Finance Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives

Dear Chair Pinto and Members of the Early Childhood Policy and Finance Committee,

At People Serving People, we work with families experiencing homelessness throughout Hennepin County. In addition to shelter and meals, People Serving People also provides supportive services for families and we operate two 4-star parent aware rated early child development centers –one on-site at the shelter and the other in the community at our Center of Excellence.

We serve a diverse group of families through our two programs, including families that are highly mobile or experiencing homelessness. In our classrooms, we utilize a trauma informed approach that focuses on social and emotional development and executive function skills to prepare kids and families for kindergarten and beyond.

Early childhood education is central to our work on preventing the experience of intergenerational family homelessness. It's an investment in the whole family and in particular, the youngest members of families. For People Serving People, this is **also about achieving more equitable outcomes for Black and Indigenous children that disproportionately experience homelessness.** As the Minnesota Department of Education has shared, 60% of Pathway I scholarship recipients identify as BIPOC and 55% of Pathway I scholarship are awarded to those in a priority category – families experiencing homelessness, child protection or foster care involved, or a minor parent family.

Many of our families use early learning scholarships and the child care assistance program to access early childhood programs. **Without this funding, priority population families with low-incomes would not be able to access quality care and early education.** In 90% of our kids, within the average time they spend at our shelter (60 days), we see they reach or show growth in one or more of the assessed developmental milestones.

While People Serving People has been able to increase access to high-quality, parent directed early childhood education for families with the highest need, there are still thousands of families across Minnesota that need access to early childhood development. Pre-pandemic, an estimated 35,000 children were eligible for scholarships.

We hope you will support early learning scholarships to ensure that all of Minnesota's youngest learners have the ability to be kindergarten ready.

Sincerely,

Rinal Ray
CEO
People Serving People



The mission of Safe Passage for Children is to rebuild the Minnesota child welfare system so children are safe and reach their full potential.

03/08/2021

Dear Chair Pinto and Members, Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee

Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota supports HF1293, a bill to increase the appropriation for early learning scholarships.

Our organization works to reduce child abuse and neglect in Minnesota. High quality research demonstrates that early learning programs reduce the number of children who are maltreated child maltreatment and the number of families that come to the attention of child protection by as much as 49%.

This has become critically important during the pandemic when Minnesota is reporting a 20% reduction in child maltreatment reports, not because abuse and neglect have declined but because children are not being seen by mandated reporters. Early learning programs provide support for families to reduce maltreatment as well as safeguards to identify children who are being maltreated.

Currently 55% of Pathway I scholarships go to children who are homeless, born to adolescent parents, or in child protection and foster care. This is helping greatly to reduce child maltreatment.

However, a significant increase in funding is needed to reach more children in these priority groups, as well as the estimated 35,000 children in total who are eligible for and need this service.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rich Gehrman
Executive Director
Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota



March 11, 2021

Dear Members of the House Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee

On behalf of the Early Care and Education Crisis Work Group, we are writing to express our strong support of H.F. 1293. The Crisis Work Group is a broad group of organizations that came together in 2018 to address two crises impacting Minnesota's young children: 1) Worst-in-the-nation achievement and opportunity gaps, stemming in part from lack of access to quality child care; and 2) a shortage of quality child care supply for children statewide. We understand these crises are intertwined and must be addressed in a coordinated way, and each of the crises has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our Work Group strongly supports H.F. 1293, which calls for increasing investment of state funds in Early Learning Scholarships. One of the foundational priorities of the Early Care and Education Crisis Work group since our inception is increasing investments in the Early Learning Scholarship Program. It meets our basic criteria for addressing both critical crises facing Minnesota, because Scholarships start early, are targeted to children who are most vulnerable, are directly linked to quality via the Parent Aware quality rating and improvement system and are flexible so that families may chose a quality program that best meets their needs. Early Learning Scholarships 1) create consumer demand to fuel recovery of the devastated child care sector and 2) empower low-income families to access the quality child care programs that help children avoid falling into opportunity and achievement gaps.

We urge your support and maximum possible investment in this critical program.

Sincerely,

Jan Kruchoski
Work Group Co-Chair
Principal, CliftonLarsonAllen Former
Chair, Minnesota Chamber of
Commerce Board of Directors

Fred Senn
Work Group Co-Chair
Founding Partner, Fallon Worldwide



LET'S WORK TOGETHER

TO CLOSE EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITY GAPS

11/6/2019

The Honorable Tim Walz
Governor, State of Minnesota
The Honorable Peggy Flanagan
Lieutenant Governor, State of Minnesota
Minnesota State Capitol Building
75 Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Walz and Lieutenant Governor Flanagan:

Speaking as individual citizens rather than for our respective organizations, we are writing to urge you to put this at the top of the state government's agenda:

Helping 35,000 low-income children under age five access quality early learning programs as soon as possible.

Tragically, Minnesota has some of the worst achievement gaps in the nation, gaps that open as early as age one. To close achievement gaps, we must close the early learning opportunity gaps at the root of the problem. If we don't get on top of this festering problem soon, it won't be long before Minnesota's communities, economy, and children are harmed.

The research about how to close gaps is clear: 1) Start early in life before gaps grow too large; 2) Prioritize limited funding for vulnerable low-income children who are mostly likely to fall into gaps; 3) Insist on the use of the best practices needed to prepare children for school; and 4) Give families the flexibility to find programs that fit their schedule, culture, and location.

Early Learning Scholarships, as originally piloted, align with those research-based principles. We also would support any other approach that does so.

We're not doing enough on this issue. At the rate of change reflected in the recently enacted state budget, it will be 2087 before those 35,000 children are helped. However, if we invested just 4% percent of the amount we currently invest in public K-12 education, we could give Scholarships to all of Minnesota's 35,000 left-behind children.

It's not often that a group like ours comes together to raise a collective voice. But this issue is of paramount importance to all Minnesotans, and we don't have time to waste.

Thank you for your consideration, and for your service to our state. We look forward to doing whatever we can to support you on this issue.

Grant Abbott

David Ahlers

Jim Andersen

Diana Anderson

Stephanie Andrews

Dario Anselmo

Doug Baker

Terri Barreiro

LET'S WORK TOGETHER

TO CLOSE EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITY GAPS

Corie Barry	Russ Becker	Archie Black	Laura Bloomberg
Fred Bobich	Alyza Bohbot	Terri Bonoff	Tom Borman
Mary Brainerd	Shamayne Braman	Marilyn Breckenridge	Toby Broberg
Peter Brosius	Bob Bruininks	Jane Buckley-Farlee	John Butcher
Armando Camacho	Tod Carpenter	Andrew Cecere	Ingrid Chirstensen
Michael Ciresi	Chris Coleman	Kathy Cooney	Jeff Cotton
Mark Davis	Laurie Davis	Marty Davis	Jay Debertin
Jeffrey DeYoung	Kathy Dolphin	Reba Dominski	Chad Dunkley
Dave Durenberger	Brett Edelson	Traci Egly	Kurt Ekert
Michele Engdahl	Beth Ford	Frank Forsberg	Tom Forsythe
Mike Freeman	Luz Maria Frias	Tom Froehle	John Gibbs
Jeff Grev	Daniel Gumnit	Kurt Hagen	MayKao Hang
Jeff Harmening	Jennifer Hellman	Takara Henegar	James Hereford
Chris Hilger	Kenneth Holmen, M.D.	Vicki Holt	Matt Homan
Tom Horner	Andrew Humphrey	Peter Hutchinson	Shelly Ibach
Mercedes Jackson	Bernadeia Johnson	Robbin Johnson	Hubert Joly
Molly Jungbauer	Neel Kashkari	Rick King	Bill Kling
John Koneck	Jan Kruchoski	Chuck Kummeth	Kelly Larson
George Latimer	Shari Laven	William Lentsch	Judie Liszt
Doug Loon	Jenifer Loon	Jay Lund	Tres Lund
Dave MacLennan	Nancy Maeker	Devinder Malhotra	Mike Martiny

LET'S WORK TOGETHER

TO CLOSE EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITY GAPS

Tim Marx	Gertrude Matemba-Mutasa	Scott McConnell	Michael McFadden
Tom McGough, Jr.	Mike McMahan	David McMillan	Eric Mercer
Roger Moe	David Mortenson	Kim Motes	Brian Murray
John Naylor	Kim Nelson	Laurie Nordquist	Todd Noteboom
Michael O'Leary	Allison O'Toole	Kelly Osborne	Todd Otis
Jim Owens	Tim Penny	Renee Popkin	Kendall Powell
Joe Puishys	Jill Renslow	Art Rolnick	Stephanie Rupp
Craig Samitt, M.D.	Sondra Samuels	Lisa Saul, M.D.	Jim Schowalter
Fred Senn	Ameet Shah	Chuck Slocum	Carolyn Smallwood
Dane Smith	Dimitrios Smyrnios	Jim Snee	Margie Soran
John Stanoch	Anne Stavney	Matt Steele	Bill Stoeri
Julie Sullivan	Bo Thao-Urabe	Rashad Turner	Brad Tutunjian
Mark Urdahl	Lindy Vincent	Mark Walchirk	Andrea Walsh
Anna Wasescha	Charlie Weaver	Bret Weiss	Tim Welsh
Tom West	Penny Wheeler, M.D.	Walter White	Ben Whitney
John Wilgers	Brooke Worden	Kayla Yang-Best	Barb Yates



Representative Dave Pinto
Chair, Health and Human Services Finance & Policy Committee
503 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 8, 2021

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Start Early Funders Coalition, we express our support for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and Early Learning Scholarship funding proposals before your committee. Our vision is that every child in Minnesota is physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively prepared for school and lifelong success.

HF 1747 and HF 1293 demonstrate the great need facing our state to educate and prepare our youngest learners. We know that investment into these critical programs are necessary to prepare our children for the workforce and stabilize our families. Both CCAP and Early Learning Scholarships provide greater access to quality care for our Black, Indigenous and children of color and their families that have been historically left behind. Increased investments, including increasing CCAP to the 75th percentile, and additional funding for early learning scholarships will stabilize our provider networks at time when rural Minnesotans are struggling to find care for their children. We must ensure all children birth to kindergarten from low-income families have access to these programs.

The Start Early Funders Coalition supports a robust early childhood system that gives children and families access to a continuum of high-quality early care and education programs. A broad range of program types, including Child Care Assistance Program and Early Learning Scholarships, supported with prioritized state and federal funding is required to support the ECE business model and for our state's economic recovery. We must maintain and continue to grow investments in critical early childhood programs based on ongoing community feedback and guidance.

Thank you,

Carrie Zelin Johnson
Start Early Funders Coalition Coordinator
Start Early Funders Coalition



Minnesota Child Care Provider
Information Network
PO Box 1136
Prior Lake, MN 55372
651-636-1989
www.mccpin.org

The mission of the Minnesota Child Care Provider Information Network (MCCPIN) is to support, promote and strengthen the profession of licensed family child care, thereby enriching the lives of providers, children, families, and communities.

March 11, 2021

HF1293 ELS appropriation

Mr. Chair & Committee members.

My name is Cyndi Cunningham. I have been a Licensed Family Child Care Provider in St. Paul for 25 years and am the current Public Policy Chairperson for Minnesota Child Care Provider Information Network (MCCPIN), a 501c3 sitewide association for Licensed Child Care Providers.

I am testifying in support of HF1293 for continued funding for Early Learner Scholarships, primarily for Pathways I over Pathways II scholarships.

Investing in our youngest has proven through many studies to be a critical step to increase brain development and close gaps in education accomplishments.

Exception is that all 4 & 5 year old eligible children should be receiving ELS prior to adding the B-3. Those eligible currently need priority before adding more children.

The investment return model in our youngest, as reported by the Federal Reserve Board, is seen at the lowest socio-economic levels, not at all socio-economic levels. Investing in those who have the least brings them into a level playing field and enriches the family and the child to support improved brain development.

It is critical to support family choice and a mixed delivery system. Families deserve the option of where they are receiving care for their children. Funding needs increased specifically in Pathways I Scholarships.

Pathways II Scholarships are awarded to the largest of early childhood educational settings: centers, schools, non-profits, etc. The setting which receives the award, has the authority to grant these scholarships to qualified children/families. The families do not have the choice except if they attend one of these larger settings and the organization awards them a scholarship.

When Early Learner Scholarships were established the intent was that the scholarships would be assigned to the family and give family choice. Pathways II was added to support the schools and organizations in a transition into this early childhood education funding. Pathways II was not intended to increase and become the primary delivery of the system. It has.



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The mission of the Minnesota Child Care Provider Information Network (MCCPIN) is to support, promote and strengthen the profession of licensed family child care, thereby enriching the lives of providers, children, families, and communities.

Currently schools, child care centers and other organizations receive not only all Pathways II funding but the bulk of Pathways I scholarships. Parents need choice not one path to support.

Licensed Family Child Care providers are rarely able to receive Pathways II scholarships to assist families in their care. Over the years approx 3 have accomplished applying for and being awarded these scholarships.

The Pathways II scholarship program is awarded based on a formula of capacity, socio-economic setting, and enrollment. LFCC's rarely have a large enough population in their care nor the potential care to apply for and receive the privilege of dispersing Pathways II scholarships.

There are individual families in these settings and communities who are not able to choose a Licensed Family Child Care setting as there aren't enough Pathways I Scholarships.

Funding Pathways I scholarships which are assigned and follow the family, accomplishes giving families choice in all settings. The family chooses where their child will receive care and the funding follows them to that setting.

Children are best served in a setting which is a 'best fit' as defined by their family, not an organization or business. Children and families need the ability to choose a setting which fits their family and have a choice of a small setting.

Families deserve the flexibility to determine the care for their children and Pathways I give them that choice option. Pathways II does not.

While increasing the funding of ELS is critical, it is most important to return to the intent of the scholarships. Overall investment in Early Learn Scholarships is critical to ensure that the youngest and most disadvantaged receive the support to succeed that is intended by this program. Righting the ship back to Pathways I scholarships is critical in supporting families and the choices they deserve.

Please support HF1293.

Cyndi Cunningham

MCCPIN Public Policy Chairperson



March 10, 2021

Dear Members of the Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee:

As you consider House File 1293, Greater Twin Cities United Way would like to provide its support to increase funding for early learning scholarships.

At Greater Twin Cities United Way, we believe that when we prioritize our youngest neighbors, we ultimately invest in Minnesota's future economic prosperity. From our work that touches the lives of over 500,000 Minnesotans in the nine-county metro area and the 95 service organizations we support, we know that one of the biggest drivers of economic stability and overall well-being for families is their children's access to quality care, learning and socialization opportunities at an early age. To advance and align early childhood efforts across the state, Greater Twin Cities United Way also serves as the fiscal host for the Start Early Funders Coalition, which includes more than 20 funders across Minnesota.

Early care and learning are critical to a child's development. Paired with stable relationships, it has been documented to have long-term benefits that build strong social skills, improved academic success and healthy brain development. From birth to age three, a child's brain produces more than one million connections each second, with up to 90% of development occurring by age five.

Despite these important benefits, nearly 35,000 children in Minnesota still do not have access to quality early care and learning opportunities. In recent years before the pandemic, Minnesota lost 12,000 net child care slots – one of the most severe shortages in the nation, forcing parents to leave their jobs or reduce hours worked. As COVID-19 continues to strain struggling child care providers through increased safety costs and lost revenue, the number of children without access to these opportunities are expected to grow.

This lack of affordable, accessible care is also affecting Minnesota's ability to build a vibrant economy. Limited options for affordable early child care disproportionately affect Families of Color and contributes to the state's unacceptable opportunity gap. It also impacts parents in rural communities, who have reported missing work or leaving the workforce altogether, having to drive an hour or more to find early care for their children. As a result, despite an acute need for skilled labor, many employers across the state are unable to fill open positions because of the lack of available child care.

There is much work to be done to address the growing need for affordable, quality child care and early learning opportunities for Minnesota's youngest children. We need to expand access for low-wealth families and their children, whom are disproportionately impacted by the opportunity gap. Increasing

early learning scholarship investments represents an important step toward building a more stable, accessible, and robust early childhood system in Minnesota.

Thank you,

Kristen Rosenberger
Director, Advocacy & External Engagement
Greater Twin Cities United Way