Dear Mr. Chairman, members of the committee,

I’m writing you today to urge you to vote no on SF 6, a proposal to provide universal preschool to all four year olds.

I have been a licensed family child care provider for almost 11 years and in that time, I’ve played a critical role in making sure the children enrolled in my program are prepared for kindergarten. I use a preschool curriculum and perform assessments to track their progress.

However, at times this has been a challenge. Not because of the children or the quality of my program, but because the definition of “fully prepared for kindergarten” seems to be a moving target.. I frequently ask parents if they know what is expected of their child for them to be considered prepared. So far, not a single one has been able to answer. I’ve called our local early childhood screening office and asked education administrators if they could provide a checklist for these parents. I’m told one doesn’t exist. If the purpose of this bill is to ensure children are fully prepared for kindergarten, why not make this information readily available and accessible to parents and caregivers?

Most of Minnesota’s four year olds already attend some form of preschool, whether it be a part-time preschool program, a child care program that offers a preschool program or a school based preschool program. The majority of children are already prepared for school. It would be an irresponsible use of taxpayer funds to take children out of programs that prepare them for school, only to put them in a taxpayer funded school-based program.

If the intent with this legislation is to ensure all children have access to a high-quality early childhood education, a bill providing preschool to the small number of children who aren’t in any pre-k programs would suffice. The bills increasing early learning scholarships would address this small deficiency. A broad bill taking children out of quality programs and placing them in the public school system goes far beyond what the authors of the bill claim they intend to do. It shifts early learning dollars from quality, private preschool programs which can provide an education at a lower cost, to the public education system without data and research to show this is better for children.

Before any additional public school based programs are funded, thorough research is needed to identify what damage would be done to 4 year olds by taking them out of a flexible learning environment and placing them in an inflexible, structured, classroom-based program. The demanding and rigorous instruction our kindergarteners are now receiving has placed an undue amount of stress on them. Ten years ago when I opened my business, children liked going to kindergarten. Now it has become a source of stress and for many, the self-esteem I worked so hard to build in them is damaged. They worry about tests, they worry about homework, they worry about not understanding the material they are expected to learn. These are our 5 year olds and they have already learned to dislike school. Please preserve the right our four year olds have to learn through play and experimentation at their own pace and when they are developmentally ready. Let them build confidence instead of tearing it down. Let them be children!

Thank you,

Jennifer Parrish

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