

February 18, 2020

HF1 Early childhood program eligibility modification

Mister Chair & Committee members.

My name is Cyndi Cunningham. I have been a Licensed Family Child Care Provider in St. Paul for 21 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 specifically in support of 3 sections of HF1

1) Extending the time frame of program eligibility to accept Early Learner Scholarships.

Until July 1, 2020, parents who have Early Learner Scholarships can utilize these scholarships at all Parent Aware Star rated programs.

Beginning July 1, 2020 these scholarships can only be utilized at 3 & 4 Star rated programs. This action will be detrimental to parents and providers alike.

For parents, their options to choose from will be limited to primarily center and school-based programs, and they will lose their current care provider if that provider is a 1 or 2 Star Rated Program. This will go against the most important factor in a child's success which is continuity of care. Relationships and learning will be lost and this is detrimental for a child's development. Parents need more options not less; parents need strong connections with providers and including 1- & 2-star programs gives them both.

For providers, the ability to work their way through the rating system will be removed as there will be no clients who can utilize their program if a 1 or 2 Star Rated program. It also will mean that those programs who are 1 or 2 Star Rated will lose clients using Early Learner Scholarships. This will mean a loss of income and one more contributing factor to business failure.

Specifically, this will most impact Licensed Family Child Care programs and their families/children. By narrowing Pathways 1 scholarships to only 3 & 4 Star Rated programs, which are primarily Center and school-based funding, the options for parents becomes even more narrow and eliminates access to Licensed Family Child Care.

Due to lower funding at the Pathways I program level, there have been fewer clients searching for care and therefore, no financial gain for Family Child Care providers as there are not clients to accommodate with Early Learner Scholarships.

Please support the extension of Early Learner Scholarships being used at all Parent Aware Rated programs.

2) Increased funding for Pathways 1 Scholarships

Pathways 1 Scholarships follow the child/family for full choice in where their child is cared for. Pathways 2 Scholarships are awarded to a care setting and the care setting determines who utilizes the funding (clients must meet eligibility criteria).

Licensed Family Child Care can essentially only utilize Pathways 1 scholarships due to the structure of the system. Therefore, most children with scholarships are only able to utilize funding at a center, Head Start or school setting.

Families need and deserve the ability to find the care setting that fits their family/child. Pathways 1 Scholarships provide that funding ability.

3) Increased funding for programs promoting and expanding childcare settings.

Funding for DEED, MIFF, Women's Venture and other programs is needed to assist the state and counties in efforts to increase access to care. The shortage of care slots is real and takes an economic impact approach by all to address. Communities need support to identify effective approaches to increasing care availability

Specifically, I would advocate for a focus on increasing Licensed Family Child Care. These settings are the most cost effective for both families and communities. Establishing a Licensed Family Child Care takes less financial investment in building structure but needs investment in human resource. Continuity of care is more prevalent in Licensed Family Child Care as there is typically 1 or 2 individuals in the care setting, where centers have multiple staff providing care. In a center, typically only the building is consistent in a child's life.

Individuals who are providing care outside of Licensed Child Care need to be encouraged and supported to become licensed for the wellbeing of children. There are settings in most, if not all, communities where there is care being provided outside of the licensing structure, i.e. illegal. Efforts in this direction would increase safety for children and increase care slots.

There is a need for this funding to be tailored to the unique settings of Licensed Family Child Care. These settings are typically in an individual's home. The investment in a private setting becomes complicated with public funding. There easily can be structure put into this investment to fund based on a providers Time/Space ratio and an expectation of staying in the business for a set number of years (2-5?).

Thankyou for your time and investment in Early Childhood.

Sincerely,

Cyndi Cunningham, MCCPIN Public Policy Chairperson
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