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February 17, 2021

Chair Pinto:

We are writing to express our support for H.F. 1024, a bill to create a new Minnesota Department of Early Childhood, and to thank you for championing this proposal. We particularly appreciate the willingness to consider our feedback and the inclusion of outcome and performance measures in the bill.

While a new Department alone will not be sufficient to achieve our shared early learning goals, we feel that it is an important organizational step towards those goals. This new Department has the potential to create a dedicated champion for young children within each administration, consolidate cross-program accountability within one department, and streamline overlapping work. It would be very valuable to have a cabinet-level leader in every administration whose primary focus is to ensure Minnesota kids are prepared for kindergarten.

Progress has been much too slow on even relatively modest early learning improvements over the years. For example, about three years ago, the Office of the Legislative Auditor made nine recommendations to enhance the function and delivery of our early learning programs. Progress related to those sensible recommendations has been much slower than we had hoped. We believe we would be further along if a single Commissioner and Department with an early learning-specific mission was accountable for ensuring those recommendations are enacted.

While we endorse the creation of this new Department, we stress that it cannot be considered a substitute for increasing investment to serve the estimated 35,000 low-income Minnesota children under age five who still can't access quality early learning programs, strengthening the Parent Aware quality rating and improvement system, and reforming existing funding streams to ensure all programs are aligned with the best available early learning research. Those improvements could be made now without a new Department, but our hope is that consolidating Minnesota's early learning programs into a single Department will be a catalyst to speed significant progress in all of those areas and ultimately result in a more efficient system that improves the outcomes for kids and families.

Thank you for bringing this bill forward. We look forward to our continued collaboration on this, and other efforts, to serve Minnesota's youngest children.

Sincerely,



Ericca Maas
Executive Director
Close Gaps by 5

cc: Members of the House Early Childhood Finance & Policy Committee