



April 10, 2026

**RE: Lasting Trauma and Economic Impacts of Operation Metro Surge on Minnesota Children**

Dear Chair Frazier and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

Children's Defense Fund Minnesota (CDF-MN) researches, develops and advocates for policies and programs that improve the health and well-being of children. A child's sense of safety is foundational to their health and well-being, shaping their ability to explore their surroundings, engage in the classroom, build relationships, and develop the confidence they need to flourish. When violence enters places where children should feel protected, it does more than cause immediate harm - it disrupts the stability children need to grow and thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to share information on the impact of *Operation Metro Surge* on children and families in Minnesota. One in five Minnesota children has at least one parent who is an immigrant, and the vast majority of these dear Minnesota children are U.S. citizens. The actions of *Operation Metro Surge* directly affected many Minnesota children.

As detailed in CDF-MN's *Amicus Curiae* brief in *State of Minnesota v. Noem*, the most profound and lasting impact of *Operation Metro Surge* has been the trauma inflicted on children. While the Operation caused immediate economic disruption for families, it is the sustained exposure to fear, instability, and loss that continues - long after the surge of enforcement activity subsided - to shape children's well-being and development.

Children did not experience *Operation Metro Surge* as policy - they experienced it as fear. They saw masked, armed agents in their neighborhoods, at their bus stops, near their child care settings and schools, and outside their homes. They watched parents and caregivers arrested and detained during routine moments - on the way to school, at bus stops, or in their own driveways. Some children were themselves detained. Others were left to wonder whether their parents would come home.

In one incident described in our *Amicus Curiae* brief, six children were trapped in a vehicle filled with tear gas during an enforcement action, and a six-month-old infant stopped breathing and had to be resuscitated. In another, a preschool-aged child was taken into custody alongside a parent. These are not isolated events - they reflect the broader conditions children were forced to endure.

Child development research is unequivocal: prolonged exposure to fear and instability in childhood creates what is known as toxic stress. As pediatric researcher Dr. Jack Shonkoff and the American Academy of Pediatrics have documented, toxic stress can disrupt brain architecture, impair learning and memory, and increase the risk of lifelong physical and mental health challenges. These effects occur when a child's stress response system is activated repeatedly without the buffering protection of stable, supportive relationships.

Research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) further shows that exposure to events such as caregiver separation, chronic fear, and household instability is strongly associated with long-term outcomes including depression, cardiovascular disease, substance use disorders, and reduced educational attainment. These impacts are not theoretical - they are biologically embedded and can shape a child's trajectory for decades.

CDF-MN's *Amicus Curiae* brief makes clear that *Operation Metro Surge* created precisely these conditions. During the Operation, children's daily lives were fundamentally disrupted. Families kept children home from school and child care out of fear. Attendance dropped. Routines collapsed. Children withdrew from play, friendships, and community life. The very spaces that should provide safety - homes, schools, neighborhoods - became sources of anxiety and uncertainty.

Importantly, these experiences did not end when the operation ended. Research shows that early exposure to toxic stress can have lasting effects even after the immediate threat is removed, particularly when disruptions include both trauma and economic instability. Children who lived through these events may continue to experience anxiety, difficulty concentrating in school, and challenges forming secure relationships - all of which have long-term implications for educational and economic outcomes.

This trauma is deeply intertwined with family economic stability. When caregivers are detained, lose employment, or withdraw from the workforce due to fear, children experience both emotional and material loss. Research consistently shows that economic instability in childhood - especially when combined with trauma - compounds developmental harm and reduces long-term economic mobility.

These impacts fall most heavily on children in immigrant families and children of color, who were disproportionately exposed to enforcement activity and its consequences. For young children in particular - those in the earliest stages of brain development - the effects are especially profound and may shape outcomes for years to come.

*Operation Metro Surge* did not just disrupt families in the moment - it altered childhoods. It replaced stability with fear, routine with uncertainty, and safety with vigilance. The consequences of that shift are still unfolding.

As policymakers continue to consider how to respond, it is essential to recognize that recovery from trauma requires more than time. Research shows that children need stable relationships, safe environments, and access to supportive services to heal from toxic stress. Investments in mental health care, school-based supports, housing stability, and family economic security will be critical to helping these children recover.

Minnesota's future depends on the well-being of its children. Addressing the lasting trauma caused by *Operation Metro Surge* is not only a moral responsibility - it is essential to ensuring that Minnesota children have the opportunity to heal, grow, and thrive.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the well-being of Minnesota children.

Together For Children,

/s/ Alexandra Fitzsimmons, Esq.  
Senior Policy Director