**Letter of Support for the House Bill 874**

**February 8, 2023**

I have been involved in early childhood education and parent education since 1973 as a child care worker, an early childhood educator, a parent educator and as a college professor/teacher educator. In addition, I have been a program evaluator of early childhood, parent education and family literacy programs for over 20 years including evaluation of the first EHS program in St. Cloud in the early 2000s. I am a member of Elders for Infants.

I support this bill to expand Early Head Start in Minnesota for three reasons:

The first reason is the expansion of a program that has a strong infrastructure and is based on our best knowledge about quality early childhood programs.

* EHS engages families during the prenatal period and provides education and support for both parents and children during this critical time. As a two generation program it has direct impacts on both parents and children.
* The program has a strong set of federal standards and support systems to guide practice.
* EHS has a history of research to back up the effectiveness of the program.

A report from the national Prenatal to Three Policy Impact Center (2-7-23) confirms this research. To summarize, Early Head Start programs demonstrate improved outcomes for young children in their vocabulary skills, improved developmental functioning, and for parents, reduced distress and the ability to create home environments that support language literacy.

A second reason for support is of this proposal is that it addresses the recruitment and development or an effective EHS workforce. My experience as a program evaluator helped me to appreciate the **heart of a good program** was always the informed and committed staff. Staff development is a smart investment that is foundational. Consistency of staff comes when wages, benefits and pathways to professional development and promotion are all available.

Over the past 15 years I have observed and participated in the focus on Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health in Minnesota. The development of the Infant Mental Health endorsement process by the Minnesota Association of Child Mental Health has had a dramatic impact on the capacity of mental health practitioners to address complex family and child mental health issues. Investing in the EHS staff that has direct contact with children and families on a daily basis through the endorsement process will improve the wellbeing of our society.

A third reason I support this bill is the collaborative structure of the demonstration project that integrates the important investments made during 2015-2017 in a Faculty Symposia involving MACMH and existing early childhood education programs in 2 and 4 year institutions. The project provided materials and workshops to higher education faculty to enable them to embed infant mental health competencies into their current child development coursework. The materials are housed at MACMH. The demonstration will strengthen the ties among MACMH, early childhood development faculty at 2 and 4 year colleges, and Early Head Start. Importantly it facilitates early childhood career pathways for Head Start/ Early Head parents and staff, and result in better quality programs leading to better outcomes for families and children.

Thank you for your consideration.

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