



Chaska ♦ Golden Valley ♦ Hopkins ♦ St. Paul
(952) 935-5588 ♦ MisAmigosPreschool.com

December 11, 2020

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of bill numbers 7SS-AM006 (Public health supports extension) and 7SS-AM007 (Child Care Assistance). It is a pleasure for me to submit this letter, as we believe that there is a great unmet need for families unable to afford quality child care.

Some background about our school: Mis Amigos Spanish Immersion Preschool has been in operation since 2001; since 2005 under current ownership. We have locations in Hopkins, Golden Valley and St. Paul. We are a full Spanish immersion program, with teaching done nearly 100% in Spanish. Likewise, nearly 100% of our teachers are native-Spanish speakers.

Our program draws interest from families of all socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures, and every year we receive many inquiries from families approved for or applying for Child Care Assistance. We have five families receiving Child Care Assistance right now; of the 19 families with Child Care Assistance who attended Mis Amigos over the past few years, 89% have been persons of color.

Many families approach us at the time they are beginning the Child Care Assistance application process, or they learn about that option from us when they ask about financial assistance. These are families that typically do not have the luxury of waiting and registering their child at a later time. All of our Child Care Assistance families have been hard-working parents who need childcare quickly. Many are single parents working one or more jobs, finding a job opportunity after a period of unemployment, and sometimes experiencing homelessness.

We have seen firsthand, over and over again, how challenging it is for families that need Child Care Assistance but cannot get approval quickly. Many take tours of our program and decide they want to enroll, but cannot do so immediately as they are either waiting for paperwork and processing of their Child Care Assistance, or they are placed on a waitlist for Child Care Assistance.

In non-pandemic times, Mis Amigos typically has a waitlist. When a spot opens up and can be offered to a family, we cannot afford to hold that spot open for very long while the family waits for Child Care Assistance approval. We have had many families sadly pass on a spot in their school of choice because they were not able to access Child Care Assistance quickly. Here are two examples of parents experiencing challenges while waiting for Child Care Assistance approval:

“Analee” – We communicated throughout 2020 with a young single mother trying to find childcare so she could start a career. She toured our center and fell in love with the program, feeling it was the right fit for her daughter. She was told there was a 1- to 2-year wait for Child Care Assistance. While she remained on the Child Care Assistance waitlist, she applied for other resources while interviewing for jobs. She delayed her summer start date at our school as she continued to struggle to find financial assistance. Finally this past fall she asked to be removed from our waitlist because she could not figure out a solution.

“Cinthia” – We have also been working recently to help a Tier 1 essential worker get approved for Child Care Assistance. In an email to us in November she expressed her frustrations: “I have looked for



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resources and the truth is I no longer know what to do. ... I love my job and I don't want to leave, but I don't see a way out! I am just so stressed out."

Even for families who are eligible and approved for CCAP, the cost of care can be prohibitive. We set our rate at the level we need to be able to pay teachers and stay in business. Although we maintain a 4-Star Parent Aware Rating, which helps families access the highest rates of Child Care Assistance reimbursement, those rates do not fully cover our tuition rates. Parents still must pay a small weekly amount to cover the difference, and even this small amount can be prohibitive for families.

Child care providers often end up subsidizing care for families receiving Child Care Assistance. We have written off thousands of dollars over the years on lost tuition related to families on Child Care Assistance. It is simply a reality of providing quality care for those most in need. We currently have space for additional families and would love for more families to be able to access the loving care and stability Mis Amigos provides. We believe families should be able to choose the care they feel is best for their children and have the Child Care Assistance to fully support them.

On another topic, I wanted to speak on the other bill being heard today that would extend the funds that have been awarded to child care providers during the pandemic. These grants have been critical to our child care business. They have meant the difference between just breaking even and losing money. Our supply costs have gone up; some critical items such as gloves have doubled in price. And yet we have fewer students generating tuition, as we are operating far below our licensed capacity. The Peacetime Emergency Grants and COVID-19 Public Health Support Funds for Child Care have made it possible to keep up with our ongoing staff costs and other fixed expenses. Families continue to withdraw or delay starting care, but they will eventually need us in safer times, so our need for additional support to stay above water is going to continue for some time.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lori D. Semke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lori D. Semke
Executive Director
Mis Amigos Spanish Immersion Preschool