
T H E M I N N E S O T A
C O U N T Y A T T O R N E Y S
A S S O C I A T I O N

December 7, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

Every day, the members of the Minnesota County Attorneys Association confront the consequences of under-investment in early education. Research shows that helping disadvantaged children access high-quality early care and education (ECE) programs makes them less susceptible to experiencing life circumstances that can lead to their contact with our offices, either as young children in crisis or as adult offenders.

We often come in contact with very young children when they experience violence, abuse, or neglect. Research has shown that access to ECE supports children's development while relieving parental stress and maternal depression, which are risk factors for abuse and neglect. This is incredibly important as being a victim of child maltreatment can lead to lower academic achievement and future juvenile delinquency or participation in criminal activity.

Similarly, providing disadvantaged young children access to quality ECE has been shown to increase the probability of high school completion. With 6 in 10 inmates nationwide lacking a high school diploma, the connection between early education and public safety enhancement cannot be ignored. Nor can the fact that participation in quality ECE programs reduces a child's likelihood of having behavioral infractions at or being suspended from school, both of which are linked to later crime. The reason for this is simple, participation in high-quality ECE programs gives children not only the foundational pre-literacy and math skills they need to be successful in school, but also critically important social emotional and executive function skills that help them regulate their behavior and successfully participate in classrooms and in society.

Despite the potential for early learning to both improve school success and prevent crime, there are currently an estimated 31,000 low-income Minnesota children who can't access the high-quality early learning programs they need to succeed in school and all that follows. We support investing in Early Learning Scholarships for these children.

Scholarships open the doors of quality Parent Aware-rated programs for low-income children, and a third-party evaluation has found that Minnesota children who are able to access those programs are making significant progress on kindergarten-readiness measures, such as vocabulary, early math skills, social competence, executive function, persistence in problem solving, and phonics. These are the foundational skills that are a prerequisite for success in school and in later life.

Scholarships are specifically designed to reach Minnesota's most disadvantaged children, prioritizing children experiencing homelessness, in foster care homes, or in the child

100 Empire Drive, Suite 200 • St. Paul, MN 55103 • 651-641-1600 • Fax: 651-641-1666

www.mcaa-mn.org

protection system. Helping these children early in life must be a top priority, and consideration should be given to the addition of similar priority for children in other circumstances that could put them at risk. One such risk factor is having an incarcerated parent another is living in a household where there is domestic violence or drug abuse. We strongly support these proactive efforts to prioritize protecting children from the negative impacts of circumstances which are entirely beyond their control.

When crimes need prosecuting, County Attorneys will always be there to serve that important community need. At the same time, we strongly support investing in Early Learning Scholarships and prioritizing those Scholarships to first reach the children at highest risk as one way of addressing the root causes of crime.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. M. Small". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "M".

Robert M. Small
Executive Director