



February 18, 2020

Dear Members of the House Early Childhood Policy and Finance Division,

As Government Relations chair of the board for the Minnesota Child Care Association (MCCA), I would like to register our enthusiastic support for the direction of House File 1 (HF1). MCCA represents approximately 250 child care centers across the state, from single independent centers to large multi-site providers. This bill represents an incredible commitment and down payment to a comprehensive, mixed-delivery birth to five system in our state, and includes many provisions we have supported for years.

We are particularly excited about the proposed investments in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and Early Learning Scholarships. These funding streams together support tens of thousands of young children and their families across Minnesota, and currently neither comes close to meeting the needs of those eligible.

This bill brings CCAP into federal compliance (thus protecting federal investment we cannot afford to lose in penalties), but recognizes that the minimum is not good enough. CCAP has never recovered from massive cuts in 2003, before which Minnesota reimbursed child care providers at the federally-recommended 75th percentile of recent market rate surveys. HF1 sets the stage to build back towards those recommended rates and away from current ones which limit family access to child care while depressing wages, and even the ability to stay in business, for child care providers.

Early Learning Scholarships are a Minnesota innovation, one also in need of additional investment. They have the added factors of availability to families who do not meet certain CCAP requirements and are tied to our state's quality rating system. We support the move to open eligibility to infants and toddlers, as these are the most important years for brain development and the most expensive years of care families face. Our preference, however, would be to make scholarships available to all income-eligible children birth – five. We do ourselves a disservice when we make supports available only to certain “age bands” within early childhood, and further complicate the system for families trying to do best by their children. Families need multiple options for all children birth – 5, including those supports that help working families access full-day, year round programming.

There are many other HF1 provisions of interest to MCCA and its members, including new investments in the TEACH and REETAIN programs. MCCA has long and enthusiastically supported both of these as ways to help early childhood educators increase their education levels and be rewarded for it through increased compensation. We know that parents can't pay more, and child care providers cannot make less. The workforce crisis in child care is well documented, and needs to be addressed in multiple ways. Increased resources in CCAP and scholarships is one big way to get resources into the system that will allow providers to increase compensation, but these programs are another key piece of the puzzle.

HF1 is smart, carefully-crafted, comprehensive, birth – five, targeted to those that need help the most, and inclusive of multiple provisions that MCCA, Democrats, and Republicans have pushed for in recent years. It is a needed jump-start to our system and recognition of the ongoing investment we must build for our children and our economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Clare J. Sanford".

Clare Sanford
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