

March 18, 2021

HF2203 ELS appropriation

Mr. Chair & Committee members.

My name is Misty Fisk, and I am from Jackson County, Jackson, MN. I have been a licensed Family Child Care Provider in Minnesota for over 12 years. I have been a 4-star rated program and a 3-star rated program since 2016.

I am completely against removing the cap on Pathways II. However, I am testifying in support of continued funding for Early Learner Scholarships with more funding for Pathways I over funding for Pathways II.

As a provider in greater MN, we see funding continuously dwindle down to nothing for us in the rural communities. We see less grant monies, less CCAP reimbursement monies, and we see less funding for our Early learners scholarships as Family childcare providers. As a large center or school, they are seeing more and more of these monies and increasing amounts every year.

I personally at one time had everyone of my daycare children on the Early Learners scholarship back in 2017. Over the years less and less of my children are qualifying for the scholarship. Most of them are being denied the scholarship due to lack of funding. Now I only have 2 children that qualify for the scholarship.

I am going to tell you about a personal experience I had April of 2020. I had a young mother that had just spent an entire year living in her car in parking lots. She recently was able to secure housing in low-income housing complex. She had a baby soon after and he was born deaf. By the rules of the Early Learner Scholarship, she should have qualified. However due to the low funds that we were given in our area she was denied. It was stated because there were so many 3- & 4-year-old on the waiting list they would not be able give her the funds. If we had the funding that we are seeing, go to schools and large centers we would not have the waiting list for the 3- & 4-year-olds. The children at higher risk would then have an opportunity to receive the high-quality childcare that they deserve to have.

Studies show that if children have high quality childcare at birth have a higher success rate. Even though I do not opposed to B-3 receiving the scholarship, I do feel we need to fix what is broken before adding to the broken system. I believe we need to allocate more funds to Pathway I and eliminate the waiting list we currently have. Once the waiting list is eliminated and we can serve all the children that are supposed to be served under its current rules only then should we look to expand.

Our Minnesota families deserve choices. The more Pathway II Scholarships you hand out to schools and bigger organizations the less money that goes to Pathway I scholarships. Family Childcare is only able to access Pathways I Scholarships, therefore, limiting the family's choices. Our families in Minnesota do not get choices with the Pathway II like they do with Pathway I scholarships. When families receive Pathways I Scholarship, they are able to choose where their children attend care. Parents may choose to take their children to Licensed Family Childcare, schools, or Large centers. Therefore, I am opposed to removing the cap on Pathways II Scholarships.

Please support HF2203.

Misty Fisk