

House Committee on Children and Families

February 13, 2024

Dear Chair Pinto and Members:

Early childhood advocates across the state have been working for many years for the establishment of a Department of Children, Youth, and Families to center childcare and early learning at the state level. We are very excited that this new department is now being formed and wish to offer our strong support for the legislature's continued work to move this process forward.

Childcare and early learning is chronically underfunded in Minnesota and around the country. While most families struggle to find affordable and accessible high-quality care, teachers in the 0-5 space earn poverty-level wages. Childcare providers, teachers, and parents deserve to have a childcare and early learning system in which they can all thrive.

Since legislation passed last spring creating this new department, administration officials have worked to build the department in a way that addresses the concerns of stakeholders including childcare providers, teachers, and parents. These officials have done a commendable job in soliciting input, engaging feedback, and centering provider, teacher, and parent voices. They have committed to continued engagement with stakeholders as the process moves into the next stages for the new department.

This department will improve delivery of early childhood programs. Currently, it is not uncommon for a childcare provider to have to look in several different online locations to answer a single question. We expect improvement in coordination, alignment of administrative services, and the use of a common application for families to apply for programs. These changes will significantly impact childcare and early learning across the state in a positive way.

Additionally, we are optimistic the department will elevate childcare and learning at the legislature and with the public, ensuring greater visibility of these programs and the economic importance of investing in them. It will also ensure accountability for serving children and families, addressing racial disparities, and developing a stable workforce. With the addition of many programs that serve kids and families outside the 0-5 age range, this new department will help ensure that young people living in any zip code in Minnesota have the opportunities to thrive.

We look forward to the continued transformation of childcare and early learning in our state so that the needs of all Minnesota children, families, caregivers and educators are met.

Sincerely,

Kids Count on Us/ISAIAH
Children's Defense Fund
Think Small
Indigenous Visioning & All Nations Rise
West Central Initiative
Minnesota's Prenatal to Three Coalition
YMCA of the North
St Paul Promise
Northside Achievement Zone

