



April 6, 2021

RE: **HF 2230**

Dear Members of the House Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of Think Small, we are writing in support of HF 2230 as amended. Many of these policies are a step forward in helping young children in our state get a better start in life. At Think Small we believe that a strong, equitable child care and early learning system not only benefits children, families, and early educators, but also keeps parents in the workforce, increases racial equity and strengthens the economy for everyone. That is why our nonprofit organization's Strategic Plan goal is that all children in Minnesota are ready for kindergarten.

Minnesota is experiencing two crises - a global pandemic and systemic racism. Minnesota has one of the largest K-12 achievement gaps in the nation when comparing white children to children of color. Even before the crisis, families struggled to find and afford high-quality child care that supported their child's development, and too many in the child care sector were struggling to stay in business. We cannot go back to what we had before and must use this opportunity to advance policies that center the needs of young children and their families, especially those disproportionately affected by these crises.

We appreciate the intent to expand access for children, birth to kindergarten entry, from families with low incomes to quality early care and education programs. We are supportive of the expansion of Early Learning Scholarships (ELS), with additional prioritization of children ages birth to two as well as the reduction in the time for families to choose a quality program from 10 months to 3 months. These policies will help more children access quality care faster and in the earliest years where it can make an even larger difference. However, we have concerns regarding the elimination of the legislative cap on the ELS Pathway II allocation. We are concerned that this change would not support the committee's commitment to both family choice and serving infants and toddlers without additional direction to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) regarding implementation of PWII ELS. Specifically, we would encourage a legislative directive to MDE regarding portability of PWII ELS. This concern stems from the MDE Scholarship Use report, that shows there are significantly more priority children served in PWI ELS than PWII ELS.

We are generally supportive of an increase in rates for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) but have concerns that any increase above the Governor's 30% increase is not intentionally linked to participation in Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System, Parent Aware.

In addition, as it relates to access to quality early care and education programs, Think Small is supportive of both efforts to expand child care to children with disabilities and the report on participation in child care by children in foster care.

As it relates to the vitally important early childhood workforce, Think Small supports TEACH and REETAIN as mechanisms to support the sustainable career pathways of early learning educators. In

addition, we support the provision of the bill that requires that 75% of the child care grants be applied to wages. As you have heard all session, early childhood educators deserve so much more support than they currently receive.

We support the Parent Aware evaluation portion of this bill. We believe the information resulting from these initiatives is critical to informing continuous improvement of Minnesota's early learning system.

Finally, we support the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and the Children's Cabinet evaluation of the use and impact of the federal funds. Collecting and analyzing data will help us all make better decisions about how to target resources equitably and support children and families effectively.

As you have heard in committee hearings, it is critical for our state's economic recovery to build back a better, more equitable child care system that works for children, families, educators, and employers. Doing so will require immediate and sustained investments along with equitable policies. We appreciate the work done by the Committee to elevate the needs of young children and their families and look forward to continuing to work together. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Barbara Yates  
President and CEO, Think Small