



- **Doctors for Early Childhood**

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Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee

Minnesota House of Representatives, St Paul, MN

Testimony in favor of HF 2 – Paid Family and Medical Leave

Dear Chair Pinto, Vice Chair Keeler, Lead Daniels, and Committee members,

We are Doctors for Early Childhood, an education and advocacy group in the Twin Cities Metro area and reaching out to all corners of our state. We are writing in support of HF2, The Paid Family and Medical Leave bill.

All children in Minnesota deserve a Great Start. This occurs when parents are excited and their stress of living is minimized and manageable. Babies learn from the moment of birth and likely before. Studies show that poverty is a potent driver of stress. 50% of pregnant women in Minnesota are on Medicaid at the time their babies are born.

Lacking income to put food on the table and a roof over one's head can cause toxic stress. As testimony before this Committee has shown, toxic stress can be passed on from parent to fetus, baby, and child. Too often this results in stunted brain growth from which health and learning gaps begin to show up as early as months of age. Unmitigated, these effects of toxic stress often cannot be remediated even with mental health treatment and special education.

The health impacts of toxic stress are many. In particular, parent-child attachment is disrupted, especially during the crucial first months of life. Breast feeding is also hampered, a key feature of parent – child attachment and child nutrition. Nutrition is hampered by struggles to put food on the table or making a choice of feeding oneself and one's child when there is not enough money to prevent homelessness. Studies show that skimping on food is the first thing to happen without sufficient income.

Parent-child attachment is foundational for the development of trusting relationships. In the absence of trust, babies and toddlers struggle to relate to others, setting the stage for withdrawal or acting out. When unmitigated these are the beginnings of mental health disorders, the precursors of which can show up as early as the first year of life. Hunger contributes as well, by babies and toddlers missing adequate protein and micronutrients such as iron and zinc, which have been shown to be essential for body and brain growth and development and emotional regulation.

This chain of events can be averted when all Minnesota families, especially young parents of limited means, have paid leave during pregnancy and the first several months of life. This assures a Great Start for babies and families. Families with adequate income during these crucial periods have much better outcomes for both parents and children. These Great Starts can lead to health and prosperity for generations to come. As you have recently heard, economists tell us that investing in Great Starts can repay the investment 10-15 times over.

In this time of historic budget surplus, funding can launch Paid Family and Medical Leave for all Minnesotans, making PFML permanent thereafter. Passing the Paid Family and Medical Leave bill will help assure a Great Start for all.

Thank you for your strong work in this Committee,

Dale Dobrin, MD, FAAP
For Doctors for Early Childhood