

# A GREAT START FOR EVERY CHILD

## **Dear Members of the House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee:**

We are a diverse group of individuals and organizations that has come together to build an early care and learning system that is affordable for families, high-quality for kids, and a sustainable career for teachers. We are writing today in support of the Early Learning Scholarship related provisions in the committee's omnibus budget bill.

Minnesota families are facing a serious child care affordability crisis that must be addressed by the Legislature as soon as possible. While the federal government has determined that families can afford to pay up to 7 percent of their annual household income for child care, the Economic Policy Institute estimates that a typical Minnesota family with an infant and preschooler is paying about 37 percent of its household income for child care. That's more than 5 times what is affordable. Families with more young children and/or lower incomes are paying even more.

We had hoped to work with the Minnesota Legislature to address this crisis this year and were thrilled with the introduction of H.F. 3681, which proposed to establish Great Start Affordability Scholarships. In the end, funding the bill was not possible given the size and scope of the budget agreed to. Even though we are incredibly disappointed to not have made the progress promised by H.F. 3681, we appreciate the committee moving forward several key policy

and administrative items that relate to our shared principle of "streamlining assistance" or supporting assistance being delivered in a way that doesn't unnecessarily burden Minnesota families or child care providers.

Given this goal, we are highly supportive of the bill's inclusion of: prospective payments of Scholarships to providers, the payment of Scholarships based on enrollment rather than attendance, and the ability for available funds to be used to build administrative systems that will make the program work more efficiently and effectively for families and child care providers. We urge passage of these provisions.

We also strongly encourage the Legislature to make child care affordability a top priority for funding in 2025. Improved administrative policies and systems are important and necessary, but funding an increase in eligibility for Scholarships as proposed in H.F. 3681 is needed to address Minnesota's child care affordability crisis.

Doing so will help more than just families struggling under the weight of enormous child care bills. It also will help Minnesota's youngest learners who need quality child care to get prepared for school and life, struggling child care providers who need more families using their services to keep their doors open, and businesses who are desperate to find enough employees during the most serious labor shortage in decades.

Sincerely,

*ABC123 Child Enrichment Center*

*All Nations Rise*

*Before Racism*

*Bethesda All Stars Childcare Center*

*Center for Inclusive Child Care (CICC)*

*Children's Defense Fund Minnesota*

*Doctors for Early Childhood*

*First Children's Finance*

*Generation Next*

*Indigenous Visioning*

*ISAIAH*

*Jill Magnell, Child Care Owner*

*Kay Hendrich, Early Care Educator*

*Kids Count on Us*

*Kristy Anderson, Licensed Family*

*Child Care Provider*

*Little Moments Count*

*Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board*

*Minnesota Alliance of YMCAs*

*Minnesota's Prenatal to Three Coalition*

*Missy Okeson and Katie Gunderson at  
Northwest Minnesota Foundation*

*MN Budget Project*

*MN Child Care Association*

*MN Parents for Affordable Child Care*

*MnAEYC*

*New Horizon Academy*

*Northstar Prosperity*

*Saint Paul Promise*

*Start Early Funders Coalition*

*TakeAction Minnesota*

*The Family Partnership*

*The Sheltering Arms Foundation*

*Think Small*

*West Central Initiative*

*YMCA of the North*



April 18, 2024

Dear Chair Pinto and Members of the Children and Families Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota's comments on HF2476 – the Children and Families Omnibus bill. LSS is a provider of essential services across all 87 counties with more than 2,500 employees who serve one in 63 Minnesotans every year. We are committed to innovative, person-centered service delivery that promotes resilience and long-term stability for people in all stages of life.

Thank you for including investments to support relative caregivers with a goal to reduce the need for child welfare involvement. Kinship caregivers play a critical role in promoting family preservation, reducing trauma related to out-of-home placement, and preventing children from entering the child protection system. We also remain deeply committed to continued advocacy for resources that support and connect all kin families – especially those who currently fall outside of out of home placement and other financial supports due to their informal kinship status.

We also greatly appreciate the inclusion of the study on pregnant and/or parenting youth while experiencing homelessness. In St. Paul, LSS' LifeHaven provides transitional housing for up to 6 mothers ages 16 to 17 and their children. This is the only supportive housing program in Ramsey County for minor-headed families experiencing homelessness, and it provides a critical service to two generations. The findings of this study will help LSS and other service providers strengthen a continuum of services for youth that build on their assets and strengths, connect them with supportive adults to ensure stability, and create a future that fulfills their potential.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity, and we look forward to ongoing collaboration on these issues. Please contact me at [erin.sutton@lssmn.org](mailto:erin.sutton@lssmn.org) if we may provide further information.

Sincerely,

Erin Sutton, MSW, LGSW  
Senior Director of Advocacy  
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

Chair Pinto  
503 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

April 17, 2024,

Dear Chair Pinto, Vice Chair Keeler, Lead Daniels, and members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of the Children and Families Omnibus Budget bill. We write as a coalition of frontline professionals with experience in caring for children who have been victims of abuse. We appreciate the Children and Families Committee's commitment to protecting Minnesota kids and improving Minnesota's child protection processes. While there are many parts of this bill that we are supportive of, we want to highlight a few items of note.

**Section 5. The Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Process**

We have long been concerned about child fatalities, and near fatalities, that were not investigated to prevent other potential harms to children. We appreciate the inclusion of this provision in the omnibus bill. This will ensure that child fatalities are investigated and reported to try to prevent more children from being harmed.

**Section 8. The Supreme Court Council on Child Protection**

We believe establishing a Supreme Court Council dedicated to reforming the child protection space will be critical to ensuring meaningful change. An advisory council will be an ongoing force for change in the system provided that the Legislative Task Force on Child Protection continues in operation and supports it, the Council has a clear and strong mandate, and the composition of the Council represents the interests of children and includes members who will challenge existing practices. We believe the current composition of the Council would benefit from adding a child abuse pediatrician.

**Section 10. Child Welfare Fiscal Analysis**

We believe that the State should put more money into the systems used to protect children and ensure their health, safety, and well-being. An outside third party doing a fiscal analysis of Minnesota's Child Welfare system will allow Minnesota to know how resources are used, what systems work, and how we could leverage additional dollars to protect Minnesota's most vulnerable youth.

Thank you for considering our input into this important matter and the opportunity to share testimony with the Committee.

We look forward to working with you to make meaningful changes to Minnesota's child protection landscape.

Signed,

Maggie Carney, RN  
Retired Child Abuse Case Manager at  
Midwest Children's Resource Center

Melissa DeBilzan  
Interim Director Safe Passage for Children

Gerard Bodell  
CASA Minnesota Board President

Rebecca Foell, MSW, LICSA  
Program Coordinator, Otto Bremer Trust  
Center for Safe and Healthy Children

Greg Gardner, MSW, LICSW  
Retired Hennepin County Child Protection  
Supervisor,  
Board Member of Safe Passage for Children

Rich Gehrman  
Executive Director Emeritus,  
Safe Passage for Children

Jamie Greshowak  
Legislative Lead Grand-USA-MN

Nancy Harper, M.D.  
Child Abuse Pediatrician, Director, Center for  
Safe and Healthy Children

\*\*Lisa Hollensteiner M.D. Retired Emergency  
Department Physician, Board Chair of Safe  
Passage for Children

\*\*Mark Hudson, M.D.  
Child Abuse Pediatrician, Midwest Children's  
Resource Center

Barb Klatt  
Family Enhancement Center

Marcia Milliken  
Executive Director, Minnesota Children's  
Alliance

Patty Moses, J.D.  
Retired District Court Referee (Family and  
Juvenile Courts), Retired Assistant Hennepin  
County Attorney

Jane Ranum, J.D.  
Former Hennepin County District Court  
Judge and Minnesota State Senator

Jeff Schoeberl, Detective and Special Victims  
Coordinator, Anoka County Sheriff's  
Office, Criminal Investigations Unit,  
specializing in physical and sexual child  
abuse

Carol Wichers MA  
Retired Social Worker and Marriage and  
Family Therapist

Caroline George, M.D.  
Child Abuse Pediatrician  
University of MN

*\*\* Member of 2014-2015 Governor's  
Task Force on the Protection of Children*



April 17, 2024

Chair Pinto and Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee

Dear Chair Pinto:

I'm writing to express thanks from Families Rising, formerly North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), for including funding for kinship programs in the Children and Families budget. Families Rising supports legislation that will fund programs to support kinship families.


Founded in 1974 by adoptive parents, Families Rising is committed to meeting the needs of waiting children and adoptive families, and other members of the adoption constellation. Families Rising supports adoptive parents, prospective adopters, young people who were in foster care or adopted, and child welfare professionals in an effort to ensure permanency for children. We serve individuals and organizations all around the US and Canada, including in Minnesota where we are located and provide post permanency services to foster, adopt and kinship families under a state grant.

Kinship families, whether informal without a child welfare case, or formal with a child in the foster care system, come to caring for the child without having classes or training to learn about all the programs that might assist them.

We thank you for including much need funding to support kinship families in the Children and Families budget.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

  
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Ligia N. Cushman, MA  
Chief Executive Officer