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March 26, 2025

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Martha Njolomole, and I am an Economist at Center of the American Experiment. I am submitting this letter to testify in support of the proposal in HF 2617 to modify the definition of education for childcare workers in licensed childcare centers.

Licensed center-based childcare is relatively unaffordable in Minnesota compared to most states. This is mainly due to stringent regulations, such as educational requirements, that raise the cost of providing care and keep providers, as well as workers, out of the childcare industry, lowering supply. According to data from Childcare Aware, in 2023, Minnesota was the seventh least affordable state for center-based infant and toddler care in the country. Single-parent families spent nearly half of the total median household income to keep their infants in daycare.

Providers in Minnesota have cited having trouble finding workers, which forces them to operate below capacity or even go out of business. Not to mention, countless others likely never go into business, owing to our state's high standards. Broadening the definition of education could expand the pool of qualified individuals available and willing to work at daycare centers, thereby improving childcare availability and affordability. I urge this committee to support this bill.

Additionally, this committee could consider further reforms to ease regulations for providers and caregivers. These include eliminating the post-secondary education credit requirement altogether and reducing the number of years of work experience that would-be teachers and assistant teachers must have before caring for children. Research evidence often suggests that expertise in early childhood development is a more critical factor in childcare quality than the duration of education. Post-secondary credits could, therefore, be replaced with pre-service training in early childhood education, as is done in a lot of other states.

All our neighboring states have relatively more affordable childcare, in part because they have more relaxed rules. In South Dakota, North Dakota, and Iowa, staff dealing directly with children, for example, must only meet age and training requirements. Childcare workers in North Dakota operate under supervision, but supervisors only need to have a high school diploma and a year of childcare work experience. In Wisconsin, childcare teachers are only required to take two post-secondary courses. Moreover, a teacher is only required to have 320 hours of experience, not thousands. Minnesota could benefit from adopting similar policies.

I appreciate your consideration, Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee:

Martha Njolomole

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