

Our mission is to strengthen food access and build healthy communities with a vision that every community in our region is food secure. We serve people experiencing hunger in 14 counties in southeastern Minnesota and western Wisconsin through a network of more than 125 food shelves, pantries and programs.



in our region,
60,790
people are food
insecure

map.feedingamerica.org



in our region,
19,440
kids are food
insecure

Channel One Programs

Food Bank

Warehouse and food distribution center serving 14 counties

Kitchen Coalition

Public/private partnership that provides prepared meals using donated food to those facing hunger in our community

Mobile Markets

Food shelf experience at areas of high identified need for people who encounter transportation barriers

Food Shelf

Food for people facing food insecurity in Olmsted County

Mobile Pantries

Drive-through food distribution in rural communities and areas with limited access to food and programs

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

Supplemental boxes of USDA nutritious food to improve the health of seniors in need

In 2024, Channel One...



supported
391,295
household visits to
partner food shelves in
our region

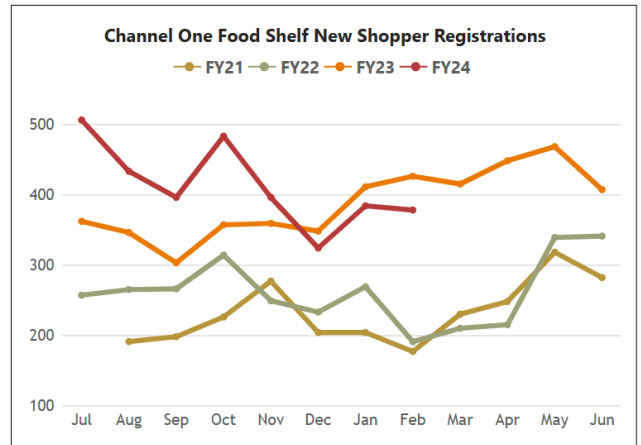
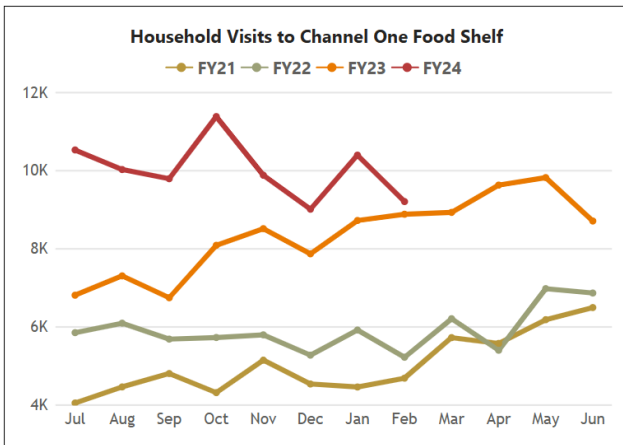


distributed
18,862,674
pounds of food to those
facing food insecurity in
our region

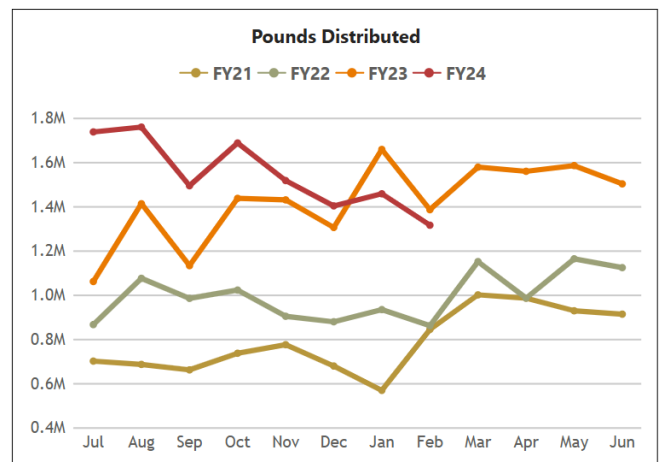
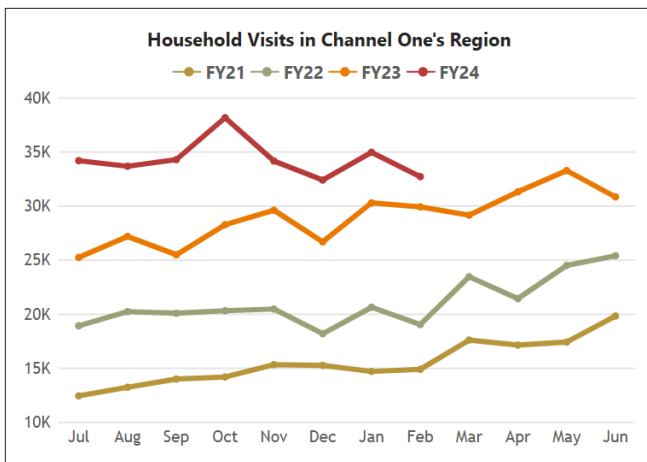


volunteers donated
13,988
hours in our
Food Bank and onsite
Food Shelf

Increased Need for Channel One's Programs



The Channel One Food Shelf is serving a historic number of shoppers, including those who have never needed assistance before. Comparing 2024 over 2023, there was a 40% increase in new shoppers. Also, the increase in new shoppers from 2022 to 2024 was 68%.



The Channel One Food Shelf and the entire region continue to serve a record number of shoppers. For the entire region in 2024, there was a 32% increase in monthly household visits compared to 2023. Also, 2024 had a 78% increase in monthly household visits compared to 2022.

In our region, in partnership, Channel One distributed approximately 18.9 million pounds for calendar year 2024 and almost 14 million pounds for calendar year 2023. This is an increase of 35% year over year.



April 8, 2025

The Honorable Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn
Committee Co-Chair
Children & Families Finance & Policy Cmte.
Fifth Floor Centennial Office Building
658 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

The Honorable Nolan West
Committee Co-Chair
Children & Families Finance & Policy Cmte.
Second Floor Centennial Office Building
658 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: Investments in Young Children in the Proposed Children and Families Committee Budget

Dear Co-Chair Kotyza-Witthuhn, Co-Chair West, and Members of the Children & Families Finance & Policy Committee:

Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota (CDF-MN) is grateful to the members of this Committee for their consistent, authentic and compassionate dedication to the health and well-being of Minnesota children and the economic security of their families. Working together this legislative session to determine which investments will improve the lives and outcomes of Minnesota's youngest members, your discussions have brought together moms, dads, caregivers, early childhood educators, research experts, nonprofit and business leaders, and others from throughout our State. Their message has been clear – investing in high-quality early childhood care and education is critical for the well-being of children, the security of families, and the vitality of businesses and communities!

CDF-MN understands the confines of our State's budgetary process, and the framework within which this Committee determines its investment priorities. We also recognize both the current economic realities and uncertainties facing our State and our country. It is within these times – the most challenging times – that we are called to speak louder for Minnesota children, especially children who have already been pushed to the margins. CDF-MN is very concerned that without greater investments in young children and their families, many children will not have access to quality, consistent, and nurturing educational opportunities. We are also concerned that families won't have needed supports to work, thereby causing greater stress and instability to parents and their families.

We were hoping this Committee could counter this current climate of uncertainty with greater investments in children, especially young children. We wholeheartedly know that you thoughtfully, prudently and painstakingly created the proposed Children and Families budget, and we stand with you in working to ensure that we have the necessary resources allocated to make childhood investments. This Committee is well-versed and invested - personally as parents and caregivers, and through the shared experiences of constituents - in the value and cost of child care. Child care is valuable to Minnesotans. It is valuable for: the healthy development of children; the ability of parents to consistently work with peace-of-mind knowing their children are well-cared for; and our communities that benefit from healthy, happy and prepared children who are ready to play, learn and succeed, and families who are healthy, productive and secure.

Child care in Minnesota is expensive. Minnesota is ranked 3rd in the United States for the cost of infant care. The average annual cost of infant care in Minnesota is \$22,659, which is \$1,881 per month or \$470 per week. A Minnesota worker, earning minimum wage, would need to work full-time for 51 weeks in order to pay for child care for their infant. Greater investments in Head Start and Early Learning Scholarships, and new funding for Great Start Affordability Scholarships could help parents with young children enter the workforce while helping to alleviate financial burdens on families.

We are pleased to see a small amount of funding for Early Learning Scholarships, but more funding is needed.

This funding means 400 more children will be able to access these critical Scholarships! That being said, we are disappointed that the amount of funding isn't more substantial. We know this Committee sees Scholarships as an integral part of Minnesota's early childhood care and education system. Because CDF-MN advocates for children and families who have been pushed to the margins, we are strong proponents of Early Learning Scholarships. Forty percent of Minnesota children who received an Early Learning Scholarship during Fiscal Year 2024 were from at least one of four priority areas: a child of a teen parent pursuing a high school or GED diploma, a child in foster care, a child in need of child protective services, or a child whose family experienced homelessness during the previous 24 months. CDF-MN has a long history of and commitment to making visible the well-being of young, homeless children. During Fiscal Year 24, 4,765 young children (30% of Scholarship recipients) receiving scholarships had experienced homelessness. Quality early childhood care and education programs, made accessible through Scholarships, can attenuate the adverse effects of homelessness, thereby positioning children to be ready to enter school, learn, and succeed.

We were hoping to see additional funding for Head Start. CDF-MN fervently believes that Head Start is one of the most important and impactful social and educational public investments Minnesota and our nation have made in young children, parents, caregivers, families, neighborhoods, and communities. This Committee has the benefit of decades of research documenting the innumerable benefits of Head Start – benefits that can appear immediately, last a lifetime, and have an impact on future generations. These effects are especially significant among Black children, Hispanic children, dual language learners, and children who are homeless. Head Start graduates:

- enter kindergarten with higher attendance levels, and maintain those levels through third grade;
- score higher on math tests in 8th grade, and are less likely to be chronically absent;
- have a higher likelihood of graduating high school, attending college, and receiving a post-secondary degree, license, or certification; and
- invest more time in their own children when they become parents – more time teaching their children, more time praising their children, more time showing their children physical affection, and more time doing their child's favorite activities.

The creation of Great Start Affordability Scholarships were also missing from the proposed budget. These Scholarships are another important piece of the early childhood care and education service continuum. From November 2021 through January 2023, CDF-MN was honored to participate in the bipartisan work of the Great Start For All Minnesota Children Task Force, which provided the impetus for the legislation (House File 1383). Great Start Scholarships could help ensure Minnesota families can afford quality, reliable child care for their young children.

Though this letter focuses on the funding pieces that are missing from the budget, we are glad to see critical investments focused on increasing food security for children and families, and funding to help families build assets through the Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota matched savings program. These investments are critical for the health and stability of our statewide neighbors.

Thank you for working to prioritize children and their families in Minnesota's policies, programs and state budget, especially in the midst of economic and budgetary constraints. We're grateful you included additional funding for Early Learning Scholarships in your Committee budget, and we're happy that more children will have access to quality early childhood care and educational opportunities! That's a win for children, families, businesses, communities, and our State! As always, we urge you to continue to prioritize children with the greatest needs and who have been pushed to the margins. Thank you for placing the well-being of young children and families at the center of your discussions and decision-making. We're grateful for your dedication and service.

Together For Children,

/s/ Alexandra Fitzsimmons, Esq.
Senior Policy Director

April 8th, 2025

Co-Chair Kotzya-Witthuhn, Co-Chair West and Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee,

I am writing to express gratitude for your support for HF1424 Kinship Licensing & Support in the Committee's omnibus proposal.

My name is Mary Lennick, and I am the Executive Director at Family Alternatives. Family Alternatives is a community based-nonprofit provider, located in Minneapolis. We are a child foster care licensing agency and provide ongoing case management services for youth in out-of-home placement. Our primary purpose is family reunification and kinship care is, far and away, our preferred placement option.

Minnesota counties and tribes have done an outstanding job of prioritizing placement with kinship caregivers when out of home placement is ordered. The hard work, however, does not end when placement is made with kin; the hard work is just beginning.

As our attention has shifted to the needs of our kinship caregivers, gaps in services have quickly become glaring. Kinship caregivers have unique and distinct needs. They typically enter the world of foster care without prior knowledge of how the system works and all that it entails. Child foster care licensing requirements are complex and have unexpected costs. Caring for a child that is not your own, yet still kin, presents dynamic challenges not widely considered. And the child welfare system is confusing enough for its own professionals to navigate, let alone a kinship caregiver who was otherwise not planning to become a foster parent.

Our kinship providers deserve more. HF1424 would provide a necessary standard for ongoing licensing requirements and critical supports. Family Alternatives is regularly in contact with kinship providers who don't even have a basic understanding of the path ahead. HF1424 creates an opportunity to change that in several ways, including offering relative providers more time to complete necessary trainings and the all-important freedom to choose who they get licensed with and. Our kinship providers deserve the time and space to focus on the heart of the matter: caring for their kin – and House File 1424 makes that possible. This is an investment for the state that will yield a significant impact for our kinship caregiving community and the children they love.

Thank you so much for your consideration,

Mary Lennick

Mary Lennick, LICSW
Executive Director



Food for today. Change for tomorrow.

April 7, 2025

Dear Members of the Children and Families Committee,

As organizations on the front lines of addressing hunger in Minnesota, we thank you for recognizing the essential role food shelves play in addressing hunger in Minnesota by including funding in your omnibus budget bill. This investment comes at a critical time, as food shelves and food banks are facing record levels of demand. To ensure they can continue to meet the needs of our communities, we urge you to build on this commitment with additional funding that will help keep shelves stocked and families fed.

Currently, 487 food shelves, mobile units, and tribal programs participate in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) throughout Minnesota that benefits from state support to ensure residents have consistent access to the food they need. These programs serve as a critical safety net, and their role in strengthening communities cannot be overstated.

In 2024, Minnesotans made nearly 9 million visits to food shelves - a record-breaking number for the fourth consecutive year. This growing demand reflects the ongoing challenges of persistently high food prices and economic hardship in communities statewide. Hunger is not confined to any one region; food shelf visits increased by an average of 18.4% across all 87 counties, affecting both rural and urban areas alike.

Federal challenges are placing increased strain on Minnesota's food shelves. The 487 food shelves that participate in TEFAP are supplied with USDA-purchased commodities at no cost to keep their shelves stocked for community members. Currently, approximately 30% of these commodities allocated to Minnesota through the Commodity Credit Corporation (TEFAP CCC) have been eliminated. As a result, food shelves will enter 2025 with record-high demand and 30% less free food available.

Additionally, significant threats to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) put even more pressure on food shelves. For every meal a food shelf provides, SNAP provides nine, making it a vital lifeline for low-income families. As federal resources shrink, we must step up and support local food shelves, which cannot carry the burden of these cuts alone while continuing to meet the rising needs of their communities.

Investing in food shelves is an investment in the resilience and well-being of our state. To meet the rising demand, it is crucial to maintain or even increase previous funding levels. A reduction in funding at this critical time would significantly hinder the ability of food shelves to serve those who rely on their services. We strongly urge you to continue championing the fight against hunger by ensuring that funding for the emergency food system remains a priority in your budget discussions. Together, we can create a future where no Minnesotan has to face food insecurity.

Thank you for your leadership and dedication to this important issue.

Sincerely,

360 Communities
A Place For Hope: Recovery and Wellness
Center & Food Shelf

Agate Housing and Services
Alden Area Food Shelf
Angels of Hope



Food for today. Change for tomorrow.

Anoka County Brotherhood Council Inc (ACBC Food Shelf)
Area Food Shelf of New Richland
Avon Food Shelf, Inc
Basic Needs Food Market
Basic Needs Inc of South Washington County
Becker County Food Pantry
Belle Plaine food Shelf
Bemidji Community FoodShelf
Bountiful Basket Food Shelf
Boynton Health - Nutritious U Food Pantry
Bricelyn Food Pantry
Bridgepointe community food pantry
Buffalo Food Shelf
Calvary Lutheran CHurch
Campus Kitchen at Augsburg University
CAPI USA
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of St. Cloud
Change Starts With Community -Shiloh Cares Food Shelf
Channel One Food Bank and Food Shelf
Climax Parish Food Shelf
Community Action Center
Community Aid Network MN
Community Emergency Assistance Programs (CEAP)
Community Emergency Service, Inc.
Community Food Shelf at First Lutheran
Community Pathways of Steele County

“Our community members and voters deserve the know they have the support from lawmakers to ensure no one goes to bed hungry.

Food is a basic need and it is our opportunity and our responsibility to help meet the needs of every person in every community within our state. Please join us in making Minnesota a hunger free state.”

- Good in the Hood

CROSS Services
Deer River Area Food Shelf

Division of Indian Work
East African Dream Inc
East Side Neighborhood Services
Edward Jones
Ely Area Food Shelf

“We are continuing to see increases in the use in our food shelves (we had 20% more usage in 2024 as we did in 2023) as economic uncertainty increase.

This same uncertainty drives down donations from our community, we need funding to meet the need of our neighbors and their families.”

- Family Pathways

Family Pathways
Family’s of Color
Fergus Falls Community Food Shelf
Flourish Placemaking Collective
Foundation for Essential Needs
FreedomWorks, Bread of Life
Friends in Need Food Shelf
Friendship Community Services, Inc
Gather and Grow Food Shelf
Glendale Seventh-;day Adventist Church
Good in the 'Hood
Grace Community Food Shelf
Grace Ministries
Groveland Emergency Food Shelf
Haven Community Food Pantry
Heaven's Table Food Shelf
Hometown Resource Center
Hope for the Community
Hope Temple Church
Hubbard County Food Shelf, Inc
Hugo Good Neighbors Food Shelf
Hunger solutions/the food group
Interfaith Action (Department Of Indian Work)
Interfaith Action of Saint Paul
Jewish Family & Children’s Service of Minneapolis
Joyce Uptown Foodshelf



Food for today. Change for tomorrow.

Keystone Community Services
La Crescent Food Shelf
Lake City Food Shelf
Lakefield Food Shelf
Lakes Area Food Shelf
Laporte Community Food Shelf
LifeGate Services
Loaves & Fishes Fosston
Lonsdale Area Food Shelf
Minneapolis Community & Technical College
Food Shelf
Melrose Area Food Shelf
Mi CASA

“Without this funding, more families will go hungry. Investing in food security supports Minnesota’s workforce, reduces healthcare costs, and strengthens our communities.

We urge you to prioritize MFSP funding to keep families fed and healthy.

- Mi CASA

Minneapolis First Adventist church
Minnehaha Food Shelf
Minnesota Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND)
Mount Olivet Lab School, Inc. (NOURISH Food Shelf)
Mpls Central Church of Christ Food Shelf
Murray County Food Shelf
Neighborhood House
New Creation Baptist Church (NCBC Food Shelf)
New Creations Ministries COGIC
New Oil Christian Center
New York Mills Area Food Shelf
North Anoka County Emergency Foodshelf
North Country Food Bank, Inc.
North Hennepin Community College
Northome Food Shelf
NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center
NuWay MBC
Open Cupboard
Open Hands Midway

Pillsbury United Communities Brian Coyle Center
Palisade food Shelf
People Reaching Out to Other People (PROP)
People Serving People
Pine River Backus Family Center
Pipestone County Food Shelf, Inc.
Prairie Five CAC

“Proctor Food shelf depends on these grants for our ability to keep our shelves stocked to serve our clients. With out them it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to keep our doors open.”

- Proctor Food Shelf

PRISM
Proctor Food Shelf
Ralph Reeder
Red Lake Falls Food Shelf
Red Wing Area Food Shelf
Rock County Food Shelf
Rural Enrichment and Counseling Headquarters
Sanctuary Covenant Church
Semcac Kasson Food Shelf
Society of St Vincent de Paul
Source MN Inc.
St. Louis Park Emergency Program
St. Catherine University
St. Olaf Lutheran Church
Taskforce INC
Teamsters Serving Teamsters Foodshelf
The Aliveness Project
The Cornerstone Food Pantry
The Food Group

“With out MFSP grants we would not be able to sustain and stay open. Our numbers are growing every day. The fear of not having enough money is already weighing on our program.”

- Thief River Falls Area Food Shelf



Food for today. Change for tomorrow.

The Harbor Food Shelf at Faith Lutheran
The Salvation Army Northern Division
The Sanneh Foundation
The Windom Area Sharing Center, Inc.
Thief River Falls Area Food Shelf
Tri-Community Food Shelf
Vadnais Heights Community Food Shelf
Valley Outreach
Vineyard Community Services
Walker Area Food Shelf
Waseca Area Neighborhood Service Center and
Food Shelf
Watsonwan County Food Shelf
WCCA Food Shelf
WeCAN

Wells Area Food Shelf
Westonka Food Shelf
White Bear Area Food Shelf
White Earth Food Shelf
YouthWay Ministries
Zumbro Valley Food Shelf

“State funding is absolutely mission critical and needed to not only keep up with demand but also to keep our organization, volunteers and neighbors (clients) with hope for a better future and sustainability.”

- Vineyard Community Services

Representatives Nolan West and Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn
Chairs, Children and Families Finance and Policy
Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

April 8, 2025

Chairs and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Start Early Funders Coalition, we are writing in support of several components in HF2436 including the inclusion of early learning scholarships funding, child care attendance and record keeping systems and child care technology grants. Investments in child care and early learning is one of the most impactful investments our state can make towards a healthier and more vibrant future.

Without investment this year, our Early Learning Scholarships program, one of the most impactful programs to support affordable and accessible child care and early learning will be cut in half. This reduction will have a significant impact on young children, and families experiencing significant hardship. Our state made significant investments in 2023, and our children deserve ongoing support to make sure they start off strong and supported. Without ongoing funding, 15,000 babies, toddlers and preschoolers who are eligible for early learning scholarships will be denied the opportunity to access high quality child care and early learning.

We are also glad to see the inclusion of flexibility for child care providers to serve children, while maintaining safety, and quality of care are included. Additional investments in record keeping systems and child care technology grants will support providers as they navigate a challenging financial environment operating under a broken business model.

Lastly, we are pleased to see this bill lower the cost of co-pays for families receiving child care assistance payments. Minnesota's economy relies on access to quality, affordable child care and early learning and parents, businesses and communities cannot thrive without an adequately supported early learning system. We must ensure all children birth to kindergarten from low-income families have access to these programs.

Our vision as a Coalition is that every child in Minnesota is physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively prepared for school and lifelong success. Our coalition is committed to supporting policies that will benefit low-income, rural and Black, Indigenous and children of color and their families; and the programs that serve them.

Sincerely,
Allison Corrado,
Start Early Funders Coalition
Public Policy Committee



An association of resources and advocacy for children, youth and families
www.aspiremn.org

April 7, 2025

Dear Co-Chair Kotzyna-Witthuhn, Co-Chair West and Members of the Children and Families Policy and Finance Committee,

AspireMN is a statewide association of children and family service providers.

This letter is to share our gratitude to your committee for your inclusion of Kinship Licensing and Support language in your omnibus proposal.

Building a child welfare system that is responsive to the relative kin caregivers who are our most prevalent source of foster care placements is in the best interest of our children, families and communities. We are grateful to the committee for including important policy provisions that recognize the unique strengths and needs of our relative caregivers.

We are also grateful to the committee for your inclusion of:

- Assurances that youth in extended foster care have opportunity for review, and ongoing access to needed support as part of their growth into young adulthood
- Updates to the out of home placement summary to be more accessible for families
- Improvements in responses to truancy for students and families
- Excluding families whose children are boarding and in need of access to treatment and services from being defined as neglecting their child in need

Your committee's thoughtful leadership and deliberation are most appreciated – we are grateful for your dedication to the wellbeing of Minnesota children and families as reflected in your omnibus proposal.

Warm regards,

Kirsten Anderson
Executive Director

AspireMN improves the lives of children, youth and families served by member organizations through support for quality service delivery, leadership development and policy advocacy.

LEAD & CARE

Association of Family Child Care Professionals



Partnering with Providers, Supporting Family Child Care Businesses

Leadandcaremn.org

publicpolicy@leadandcaremn.org

April 2, 2025

RE: H2436DE1-1239738520587466880.pdf – House Omnibus Bill

Chairs and Committee Members:

My name is Cyndi Cunningham. I have been a Licensed Family Child Care Provider (FCC) in St. Paul for 27 years and am the current Public Policy Chairperson for Lead & Care, a 501c3 sitewide association for Licensed Child Care Providers.

I am testifying on behalf of Lead & Care regarding the following sections of the House Omnibus bill.

67.10 (v) the license holder shall forfeit \$500 for each occurrence of failure to comply....

We see this fine increase as an unnecessary increase. Fine punishment does not bring change in compliance. What makes a difference is a supportive system which assists in compliance. Currently many FCC programs are involved in the 5-year renewal of their background studies. This fingerprint process has been done once before so it is not a known system. In fact, the first round had DHS heading the implementation and now they are telling the counties they are to be heading. FCC Programs are not being consistently nor clearly notified of the process by their counties and may run into deadlines (as is being experienced) with short notice and poor options for completing the check. Background studies are critical, the process is poorly implemented, programs need not be hit harder in their pocket for the agency's poor implementation.

67.27 Sec. 2. [142B.68] VIDEO SECURITY CAMERAS IN CHILD CARE CENTERS.

Lead & Care does not support this extreme implementation to resolve what? Cameras will not prevent maltreatment, only create a false sense of security. The cost to implement will only add to a program's expense in purchasing equipment (the budget by the state is inadequate) nor the time expenditure of additional staff time to maintain and retrieve inquiries. All of this financial and staff investment will increase costs which will be passed on to overburdened parents/guardians. Most critically it draws away from the most important aspect of maltreatment prevention which is quality time with children. If staff are properly trained,

supported and monitored, the levels of maltreatment which led to the implementation of cameras would not be necessary.

86.4 (d) Prior to a request for reconsideration under paragraph (a), if the applicant or license

This provision allows programs time to evaluate reconsideration options and also the *interpretation guidance* detailed in proposed legislation. Giving this time without public scrutiny allows the program to clearly identify their options.

88.1 Sec. 7. [142B.181] POSTING LICENSING ACTIONS ON DEPARTMENT

This step is a critical point in ensuring that programs have a fair and just due process regarding licensing actions. Programs must be held accountable for wrong actions; however, the letters are accusations and case building by the agency. These are not helpful to the public as typically actions are being taken against the program. A summary of a licensing action is comparable to the current correction order summary which serves the public interest. Details of the case are available through the county or the state agency upon request so are still public.

100.1 Sec. 23. DIRECTION TO COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND 100.2 FAMILIES; STANDARDIZED COUNTY-DELEGATED LICENSING.

We welcome the time line establishment and the requirement for the electronic licensing tool to be brought to the program. We are disappointed that the requirement for the state agency to communicate implementation decisions in a timely manner are not included. It is set up for failure that programs do not know what the rules are. Licensors are inadequately informed/educated on what DHS/DCYF expectations are and therefore, the only entity which may know what the 'speed limit sign is the state agency. All power in their hands means counties and programs are on shaky ground.

100.10 Sec. 24. DIRECTION TO COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND 100.11 FAMILIES; AMENDING CAPACITY LIMITS.

This accommodation, excluding a providers child 8 years and older from ratios is welcomed. Often these children are at school and only in the home for shorter periods of time. They also are independent and involved in other areas of activities.

We would have also liked to have seen DHS's current implementation that a provider's own children can be treated as our children and not a client's child in the perspective of parenting, supervision and discipline. This implementation has already taken place without communication to programs. This continues to restrict parenting rights of providers which the courts and the commissioner have determined should be given. The Modernization Draft #2, page 30, spells out how DHS is implementing in their own words. They should be included in this session to move forward for full transparency.

Thank you for your time and investment in the state's children, families and those who provide care.

Cyndi Cunningham,

Lead & Care Public Policy Chairperson, 651-470-4857



Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota

12800 Whitewater Drive

Suite 100 – 2055

Minnetonka, MN 55343

Tel: (952) 975-2278

Email: contactus@safepassageforchildren.org

Website: safepassageforchildren.org

Rep. Kelly Moeller
5th Floor Centennial Office Building
658 Cedar St.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Rep. Paul Novotny
2nd Floor Centennial Office Building
658 Cedar St.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Sen. Ron Latz
3105 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Sen. Warren Limmer
2221 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: HF 1424

Dear Rep. Moeller, Rep. Novotny, Sen. Latz, and Sen. Limmer,

We write on behalf of Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota and a coalition of frontline professionals with experience caring for children who have been victims of abuse. While we believe that foster children staying with kin is optimal when safe, we are concerned that proposed changes to kinship foster care eligibility could endanger children who are already traumatized.

In 2021, a group of us, including Chief Justice Kathleen Blatz, negotiated changes to foster parent eligibility with proponents of more flexible licensing standards. Many restrictions relative to lesser crimes were removed, while restrictions for significant crimes were kept. This bill's recommendations advocate for changes that would weaken these previously agreed upon requirements. It raises significant concerns because the primary purpose of foster care placement—whether with relatives or others—is to ensure the safety and well-being of the child.

We oppose the clauses of HF 1424:

Adjusting Felony Disqualification Periods: Modify the five-year automatically disqualifying felonies provision to begin with the date the crime was committed versus conviction.

Our concerns: Shifting the starting point to the date the crime was committed may mean that the legal proceedings are still ongoing and, in some cases, that the person convicted is still serving a sentence.

Reducing Disqualification Periods for Termination of Parental Rights (TPR): Modify the disqualification period for a prior involuntary TPR/TPPLC from 20 years to 7 years.

Our concerns: The termination of parental rights is a serious process, not taken lightly by the courts and except in rare circumstances results from significant parental abuse and/or neglect. Even “voluntary” TPRs may be pleas that were made because the individual was told that a decision by the court for an involuntary TPR is imminent. A child being removed from an abusive home is already traumatized and should not be placed with someone who has previously committed significant abuse to a child. The change from a permanent bar to a 20-year bar happened only a few years ago.

Removing Specific Violent Crimes from Permanent Disqualifications: Remove assault in the first degree from the list of permanent bars to the list of five year bars in Minnesota.

Our concerns: The crime in question is an offense for which the courts have found, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the offender committed a violent act. A conviction of First-Degree Assault involves causing great bodily harm to a victim, which may include a high probability of death, serious disfigurement, or the permanent or protracted impairment of a limb or organ. Individuals with a history of violent crimes often exhibit traits like difficulty with impulse control and aggression, which increase the risk of abusive behavior. Children removed from an abusive situation deserve a stable environment and should not be placed with someone who has demonstrated significant criminal behavior.

As these proposed changes are considered, it is essential to ask: Are these changes in the best interest of the child? Would you want your child or relative placed with someone who has been convicted of a violent crime or lost their parental rights?

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on these proposed changes to the foster care license system. We trust that you will prioritize the safety and well-being of Minnesota’s most vulnerable children in your decision-making process.

Signed:

Elizabeth Bergman
Co-founder of Family Enhancement Center

Gerard Bodell
CASA Minnesota Board President

Maggie Carney, RN
Retired Child Abuse Case Manager at
Midwest Children’s Resource Center
Board Member of Safe Passage for Children

Melissa DeBilzan
Executive Director of Safe Passage for Children

Cassie Dibeler, MS MPhil, PhD degrees in criminal justice and psychology

Executive Director, North Star Family Advocacy Center

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

Tory Hart and Josephine Josephson

Father and Step-mother of Eli Hart who, tragically, was killed by his mother

Margie Hogan, M.D.

Retired pediatrician, Hennepin County Medical Center

****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
Medical Director Midwest Regional Children's Advocacy Center

Brandon Jones

Executive Director at Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health

Barb Klatt

Family Enhancement Center

Sean McKnight

Retired Apple Valley Detective, Crimes against Persons and Children

Deena McMahon, MSW

Family therapist, Consultant

Marcia Milliken

Executive Director, Minnesota Children's Alliance

Sgt. Patrick Myslajek

Crimes against Children Unit, Minneapolis Police Department

Jane Ranum, J.D.

Former Hennepin County District Court Judge and Minnesota State Senator

Christy Shannon

Executive Director of Cornerhouse

Jeff Schoeberl

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

Roger Sheldon, M.D., MPH

Retired Pediatrician, Emeritus Professor of Pediatrics, University of Oklahoma

Mike Tikkanen

Kids at Risk Action

Carol Wichers, MA

Retired Social Worker and Marriage and Family Therapist



Jackie Benoit-Petrich
Civic League Day Nursery
427 6th Ave SW
Rochester, MN 55902

Representative Nolan West, Chair
Representative Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, Chair
Children and Families Finance and Policy

Dear Chair West and Chair Kotyza-Witthuhn and committee members,

My name is Jackie Benoit-Petrich and I am the Executive Director of Civic League Day Nursery in Rochester. Today, I am expressing my strong support for FH1383, HF470 and HF2017. I do, however, have concerns with HF1915 (security camera bill) and the talk of increasing background study fee increase.

My concern is that the installation of cameras in programs would prove very costly not only for the cameras themselves but the software, monitoring screens and bandwidth to support them.

The very thought of a child or children being abused or subjected in any way to physical or emotional abuse is appalling for sure but the addition of cameras is not a sure deterrent from those actions as evidenced by abuse that has been recorded. Additionally, there is a concern that such a bill sets providers up to take undue blame for incidents that occur outside of their care. Child care providers already operate in a highly scrutinized environment, and adding surveillance does not necessarily equate to increased safety. Instead, it creates an atmosphere of suspicion and adds significant costs, which many providers cannot afford. Given the existing financial challenges child care providers face, implementing a costly surveillance requirement would further strain an already fragile industry.

With the issue of background studies, there is a tricky navigation in the system that even sends notices for disclosure into trash and spam boxes or the email coming from "nobody.com" so the recipient doesn't open it. It's time to invest in a streamlined system that is easily navigated to meet compliance without this very cumbersome and lengthy process.

Thank you for your inclusion of our state's providers as you consider these proposed bills. I urge you to consider the implications of these proposed bills carefully. Supporting legislation like HF1383, HF470, and HF2617 will contribute to a stronger, more effective child care system, whereas proposals like HF1915 and the background check fee increase will only create additional burdens and undermine the trust and viability of providers.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these critical issues. I appreciate your dedication to Minnesota's families and child care system, and I urge you to support policies that truly benefit providers, children, and families alike.

Very Sincerely,

Jackie Benoit Petrich

execdir@cldnmn.org



Phone 651.439.2446
Fax 651.439.2071
E-mail Evolve@EvolveServices.org
Web EvolveServices.org

*Growing Families
Enriching Lives*

April 7, 2025

Re: HF1424 – Kinship Licensing and Support

Dear Co-Chairs Kotyza-Witthuhn and West, and Members of the House Children and Families Committee,

I am writing in support of HF1424 (Kinship Licensing and Support proposal) as the Executive Director of EVOLVE Family Services. Our agency has provided child-centered family services in Minnesota for over 47 years and is a recognized leader in Kinship Foster Care licensing and support. Since 2016, we have served over 670 children in relative placements. Approximately 78% of the children we are serving are children of color. This overrepresentation underscores an even greater importance in keeping children within their family systems, especially with the State's implementation of the African American Family Preservation Act.

Kin families need responsive care and specialized support. Foster care licensing involves significant paperwork, background checks, training, home preparation, and an invasive assessment process. Some relatives have reported feeling that they were not given due consideration or responsive care from counties, or did not feel that they would receive an unbiased assessment given family history with county interactions. Due to the sensitive and invasive nature of this work, as well as the research-proven benefits of keeping children within their family systems, we feel it is very important that interested relatives are provided due consideration and unbiased assessment with a licensing provider of their choice, without barrier in referral or cost incurred to them, whether that is with their county of residence or a private community-based organization. Several grant funding sources and various county contracts currently support this work, with the counties holding placement decision authority regardless of where the assessment is conducted and license held. With funding constraints, a partnership between counties, state and private organizations is necessary for the best interests of children. Nonprofit licensing agencies alone cannot bear the cost of this vital work, nor should families be expected to.

Minnesota's current licensing process does not provide for differences in licensing a grandparent versus a non-relative provider. Because this process is not specialized, we have found that supporting kinship families through the standard licensing process takes more than double the time of working with non-relative foster parents. EVOLVE supports the requirements for providing kinship caregivers with clear information and access to their full breadth of options for licensing and support, the development of extended deadlines for trainings after licensure, and creating more relative-specific exceptions to the child foster care licensing process.

Sincerely,

Susannah Barnes, LSW, CSW - Executive Director

Dedicated to a world where everyone has nurturing, permanent, and supportive familial relationships.

Dear Chair West, Chair Kotyza-Witthuhn, and members of the Children and Families Committee,

Thank you so much for your bold, innovative work surrounding child care this session. I was honored to testify in support of House File 2617 last week. That was my first time being at the capitol and it was inspiring to be there and see all the members of the committee working together - across party lines - towards positive change.

Then, I was so surprised to learn about another proposal, House File 1915 requiring cameras in child care centers. This is hugely contrary to the collaborative discussion in support of child care licensing reform. House File 1915 imposes new, burdensome regulations on the field of early childhood education that really wouldn't protect children at all.

I understand wanting to protect innocent, defenseless infants and toddlers, because they cannot speak out for themselves to report when maltreatment is occurring. Unfortunately cameras don't tell the full story either. There are always places that are not viewable by the camera where maltreatment could occur. Plus, cameras can only catch when maltreatment occurs. As a mother and as a director of a child care center, I would much rather prevent maltreatment.

The only way to truly protect children is by increasing the professionalism of the early childhood field. The first step toward that is to reduce early care provider's stress by increasing wages, providing benefits and heightening professional development. I'm hopeful that rather than funding video surveillance, you will help provide continued funding for Great Start Affordability and Early Learning Scholarships.

The second step in increasing professionalism is the work being done in your committee already with House File 2617 - that separates health and safety licensing requirements from quality learning requirements. This will help move the system to levels of national accreditation with learning-rich environments where children can safely play, learn and grow.

We all want children to be safe. Cameras, however, only provide a false sense of security.

I urge you to support our most vulnerable population by maintaining funding for scholarships and wages and working on truly modernizing our child care licensing system.

Thank you!

Christina Valdez (she/ella)
Director Listos Preschool and Childcare
1503 2nd Ave NE, Rochester MN 55906
(507) 226-8490
director@listoskids.org
www.listoskids.org

Representative Nolan West, Chair
Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, Chair
Children and Families Finance and Policy

Dear Chair West, Chair Kotyza-Witthuhn, and members of the Children and Families Committee,

I am writing today in strong **opposition to HF1915**, the bill that would mandate security cameras in licensed child care centers. While I fully understand and appreciate the intent behind this bill—ensuring transparency and safety—I believe it moves in the wrong direction. In our own child care program, we *do* use cameras, and we genuinely value what they add to our environment. However, **requiring** all providers to implement them is an overreach. It reflects a larger issue in our licensing system: the steady accumulation of mandates that limit flexibility, increase costs, and drive providers out of the field. We need **fewer** one-size-fits-all requirements—not more.

Providers should be trusted to choose what is best for their own programs. And parents should be free to select programs that align with their values—whether that means choosing a center with cameras, or without. A state mandate doesn't just increase expenses for providers and families alike, it sends a damaging message: that we don't trust early childhood professionals to make smart, safe, and family-centered decisions.

HF1915 risks pushing more providers to leave the field by adding yet another expensive and unnecessary hurdle. It's a perfect example of a well-intended idea that misses the mark by creating more red tape rather than supporting providers or families.

In contrast, I **strongly support** bills like:

- **HF470**, which boosts Early Learning Scholarships;
- **HF2617**, which finally addresses much-needed regulatory reform;
- **HF1383**, which advances the Great Start Affordability program.

These bills are excellent examples of how to support child care in Minnesota by reducing barriers and providing meaningful support to both families and providers. HF1915 does the opposite—it adds cost, complexity, and a tone of distrust.

I respectfully urge you to reconsider HF1915 and focus instead on legislation that uplifts and empowers the child care community rather than burdening it further.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,
Teresa Bahr
Owner / Executive Director
Early Advantage

Amber Sydloski
Creative Kids Academy -Orono
[2180 North Shore Dr.](#)
[Orono, MN 55391](#)

Representative Nolan West, Chair
Representative Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, Chair
Children and Families Finance and Policy

Dear Chair West and Chair Kotyza-Witthuhn and committee members,

I am the center director of Creative Kids Academy Orono and today I am writing to express my strong support for HF1383-Great Start Affordability and HF2617-Regulatory Reform. At the same time, I have large concerns with HF1915, the security camera bill which poses significant concerns for privacy, trust, and financial burdens on providers.

HF1915, the security camera bill, raises serious concerns regarding the privacy of young children in childcare settings. This raises the risk of a security data breach resulting in child privacy violations. Childcare providers already operate in a highly scrutinized environment, and adding surveillance does not necessarily equate to increased safety. Additionally, the money going towards these security cameras could be used to obtain and retain experienced, quality teachers.

HF1383-Great Start Affordability, The Compensation Grant is crucial for retaining dedicated childcare professionals and maintaining stability within the industry. Without this grant, many providers will struggle to remain open, and families will have nowhere to bring their children for early learning scholarship use. Some centers used this grant to pay teachers a higher wage but if this grant goes away, they will have to doc those wages due to no funding. As you hear my Executive Director, Brandy Sroga-Coons' testimony on Wednesday, April 2nd -We used the grant for a Life Essential Fund to offer staff a way to pay for anything life throws their way, i.e. car troubles, medical bills, personal debt, child's activities, or even taking time for themselves. To take away this grant means taking away even more of what our amazing teachers deserve!

I urge you to consider the implications of these proposed bills carefully. Supporting legislation like HF1383 and HF2617 will contribute to a stronger, more effective childcare system, whereas proposals like HF1915 and the background check fee increase will only create additional burdens and undermine the trust and viability of providers.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these critical issues and thank you to each of you for your continued support of the childcare system. Knowing that others in the world who don't work in the field have the same passion and care as those of us who do work in the field means the world to all of us!

Sincerely,

Amber Sydloski
Orono Center Director
Creative Kids Academy

Dear Co-Chair Kotyza - Witthuhn & Co-Chair West,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to any legislative proposals requiring the installation of surveillance cameras in childcare centers. As the executive director of Meadow Park Preschool and Child Care Center, I am deeply committed to ensuring the safety, well-being, and development of the children in our care. While I understand the intent behind such a mandate, I firmly believe that requiring cameras in childcare settings presents significant concerns and is a slippery slope with unintended consequences.

First and foremost, the presence of cameras in childcare centers raises serious concerns about privacy. Young children, educators, and families deserve a level of trust and respect that is incompatible with constant surveillance. Requiring cameras could undermine the warm, nurturing environments that are essential for early childhood development, replacing them with a culture of scrutiny and distrust. Additionally, the potential for recorded footage to be misused, accessed improperly, or even hacked poses a significant security risk to the very children such measures intend to protect.

Furthermore, mandating cameras places an undue financial burden on childcare providers. Many centers, especially smaller programs, operate on tight budgets and already face significant regulatory requirements. The cost of installing and maintaining a surveillance system, along with the associated security measures needed to protect sensitive footage, would be an added strain on resources that could be better spent on enhancing curriculum, staff training, and classroom materials.

This proposal also sets a dangerous precedent. If cameras become a mandated requirement for childcare centers, where does the line get drawn? Will other educational settings, including elementary schools and even homes of in-home childcare providers, be next? The introduction of such surveillance measures erodes trust in early childhood professionals, whose expertise and dedication should be recognized and respected rather than monitored in this intrusive manner.

The key to ensuring quality care is not surveillance, but rather strong relationships between childcare providers, families, and regulatory agencies. Existing oversight mechanisms such as licensing inspections, accreditation processes, and open communication between caregivers and parents are far more effective in promoting a safe and nurturing environment than requiring constant video monitoring.

I urge you to oppose any legislation that mandates the use of cameras in childcare centers and instead focus on policies that support and uplift childcare providers, ensuring we can continue offering high-quality, developmentally appropriate care for young children. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further and would appreciate your support in protecting the integrity of early childhood education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Karin J. Swenson
Executive Director, Meadow Park Preschool and Child Care Center
Rochester, MN 55904
507-289-6483
kswenson@mppccc.org

Summit School
1600 North 8th Ave East
Duluth, MN 55805

Chair West,
Chair Kotyza-Whitthuhn,
Members of the Children and Families Committee,

Hello, my name is Nate Byrne and I am one of the directors of Summit School, a non-profit childcare center in Duluth. I am writing today to urge your support for Great Start Compensation Payments (HF2728), licensing reform (HF2617), and for more funds to be made available for family scholarships (HF1383, HF470). I am also writing in opposition to requiring childcare program's already stretched budgets to require video monitoring and recording (HF1915).

Of all the bills I am urging you to support today, the Great Start Compensation Payments are ones that have the most immediate impact on our ability to continue to offer high quality childcare. Students, families, and providers all benefit from reducing turnover of staff we employ. There is no substitute for benefits of long-term relationships between caregivers and families. Unfortunately, the full-time wages and benefits we are able to offer are significantly less than teaching positions in the school district. Our part time positions offer a lower wage than Menards or McDonalds. We are already asking staff to take a pay cut in order to take a job that they love and we rely on the Great Start Compensation payments to support those wages. Losing that support from the state would lead directly to us losing employees.

The licensing system that we are currently operating in is a behemoth of band aids that requires most of our administrative time to be spent generating compliance paperwork instead of serving kids. I had the opportunity to testify before the Senate Health and Human Services committee on 3/26 on the importance of starting fresh to right size the licensing requirements for childcare.

I am also a proud parent of two and our youngest will be going to kindergarten next fall. The impact of paying for childcare on our family budget has been huge. Both my wife and I have stable employment as educators and are still barely able to cover the costs. Allocating funds to families to support the cost of care will help more young families be able to work for something more than just covering the cost of childcare.

As a childcare provider and former kindergarten teacher, the health and safety of the students I serve has always been my top priority. In the first week of kindergarten every year, we talked about teacher jobs and student jobs and I stressed that my most important role as a teacher was to keep them safe and only once everyone felt safe could we focus on learning. Requiring a camera in every classroom and requiring that footage be stored does little to support safety and has a large impact on costs. While this bill does allocate grant funds to help cover these costs, in a tight budget year and with even tighter margins in the childcare market I would much prefer to see these funds allocated to any of the bills mentioned above. Asking someone else to care for your child requires an enormous amount of trust. The risks of data security, privacy, and assumption that providers need to be monitored at all times introduces additional stress into an already precarious market. I think we can achieve the health and safety goals of this video monitoring bill by updating the licensing relationship providers have with the state.

This letter is long and yet it reflects only a portion of the things I hope for the committee to know about the realities of providing care in this market. I truly appreciate you taking the time to solicit input from the folks who will be directly impacted by this legislation. Please reach out with any clarifying questions you may have as you consider these and future bills that impact childcare.

Thank you,

Nate Byrne
Director
Summit School

Megan Schmitz
Lakeside Early Learning
4628 Pitt Street
Duluth, MN 55804

Representative Nolan West, Chair
Representative Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, Chair
Children and Families Finance and Policy

Dear Chair West, Chair Kotyza-Witthuhn, and members of the Children and Families Committee,

My name is Megan Schmitz, I am an early childhood educator, and I am heavily invested in the well-being and safety of children. I am writing to express my support for HF1383- Great Start Affordability, HF470-Financial support of early learning scholarships, and HF2617- Regulatory reform which I believe are important in supporting the early childhood system. I am also writing to express my concerns about bill HF1915 which would require video surveillance in centers, specifically their infant and toddler programs. While I understand the intention behind this legislation, I believe this bill represents an overreach that invades the privacy of families and caregivers and infringes the trust between providers and parents.

As a parent, I would not want another parent or guardian to have access to footage of my child in moments of conflict, especially if that footage could be used to misinterpret an isolated incident. Not only would this disrupt the trust between provider & family but also cause tension between families. The potential for this bill to create mistrust and an overly punitive environment between parents and childcare providers is significant. It risks damaging the relationships that are critical to a child's well-being and development.

Additionally, as someone who works within the childcare system, I can confidently say that this bill places yet another burden on an industry that is already overwhelmed with unnecessary regulations. Childcare providers are doing their best to care for children, but this bill fails to recognize the financial and logistical strain that this bill would cause. The cost of implementing and maintaining video cameras is unfeasible for many centers, especially smaller or nonprofit centers who are already struggling, despite the funds appropriated under this bill.

Let's put the focus towards funding for the system so childcare workers can make a living wage, have access to benefits, and have access to high quality training so that childcare workers can stay in the field and continue to provide high quality care to our children.

I urge you to reconsider this bill, not only for the sake of families and providers, but also for the future of early childhood education in Minnesota.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Megan Schmitz

Kayley Spencer
Lakeside Early Learning
4628 Pitt Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55804

Representative Nolan West, Chair
Representative Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, Chair
Children and Families Finance and Policy

Dear Chair West, Chair Kotyza-Witthuhn, and members of the Children and Families Committee,

My name is Kayley Spencer, and I am the Executive Director of Lakeside Early Learning, a non profit childcare center in Duluth, Minnesota. We serve up to 131 children, providing high-quality early education while ensuring families have access to safe and nurturing care. I am writing to express my support for HF1383- Great Start Affordability, HF470- Financial support of Early Learning Scholarships, and HF2617- Regulatory Reform, which I believe are essential to creating a sustainable and thriving child-care system in our state.

I am also writing to express my concerns about HF1915, which would require video security cameras in infant and toddler classrooms. At Lakeside Early Learning, the safety and well-being of children are our top priorities. However, I am deeply concerned about the implications this bill would have on early childhood programs across Minnesota.

While I fully support the goal of keeping children safe, HF1915 introduces a number of challenges that I believe will ultimately harm the very system it seeks to improve. The financial burden on providers is significant, particularly given the already fragile funding landscape for early childhood education. Additionally, the timeline for implementation is far too rapid, leaving programs little time to adjust or prepare for such sweeping changes.

There are also real security concerns raised by the bill. In its current form, the requirements could unintentionally create vulnerabilities rather than strengthen protections.

Perhaps most troubling is the message this bill sends. It appears to be built on a foundation of distrust- distrust in providers, in educators, and in the families we serve. This is counterproductive to building the kind of collaborative, high-quality system that Minnesota's children deserve.

If we want to reduce incidents and improve care, we must invest in what works: increasing staffing, supporting fair wages that retain qualified professionals, expanding access to training, and providing the resources necessary for quality programming. These are the changes that will make a meaningful difference.

I respectfully urge you to reconsider HF1915 and instead work alongside providers to create supportive, thoughtful policy that strengthens early care and education in our state. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Kayley Spencer
Executive Director
Lakeside Early Learning

Courtney Greiner
Esko Minis Childcare and Preschool
2 Beth Ann Drive,
Esko, Minnesota 55733

Representative Nolan West, Chair
Representative Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, Chair
Children and Families Finance and Policy

Dear Chair West and Chair Kotyza-Witthuhn and committee members,

As some of you may know, I am the owner and director of a community childcare center in Esko, Minnesota, Esko Minis Childcare and Preschool, and today I am writing to express my strong support for HF1383-Great Start Affordability, HF470-Financial support of Early Learning Scholarships, and HF2617-Regulatory Reform, which I believe are critical in supporting child care providers and improving the early childhood care system in Minnesota.

At the same time, I do have large concerns with HF1915, the security camera bill, and the background check fee increase which pose significant concerns for privacy, trust, and financial burdens on providers.

The Affordability Bill, the Compensation Grant, and the Regulatory Reform Bill are essential to ensuring that child care providers can continue offering high-quality care to families across Minnesota. The Affordability Bill will help alleviate the financial strain on families seeking early childhood education, making it more accessible to those who need it most. The Compensation Grant is crucial for retaining dedicated child care professionals and maintaining stability within the industry. Without this grant, many providers will struggle to remain open, and families will have nowhere to bring their children for early learning scholarship use. Additionally, the Regulatory Reform Bill is a much-needed step toward reducing administrative burdens and allowing providers to focus on delivering quality care instead of navigating excessive red tape.

HF1915, the security camera bill, raises serious concerns regarding the privacy of young children in child care settings. Introducing cameras into these environments could inadvertently create risks for data security, child privacy violations, and unnecessary scrutiny of providers who are already highly regulated. Furthermore, the presence of cameras suggests an inherent mistrust of providers, which is not the message we should be sending to those who dedicate their lives to caring for and educating our youngest children.

Additionally, there is a concern that such a bill sets providers up to take undue blame for incidents that occur outside of their care. Child care providers already operate in a highly scrutinized environment, and adding surveillance does not necessarily equate to increased safety. Instead, it creates an atmosphere of suspicion and adds significant costs, which many providers cannot afford. Given the existing financial challenges child care providers face, implementing a costly surveillance requirement would further strain an already fragile industry.

Regarding the issue of background checks, I want to clarify that the high number of citations in this area is not due to provider negligence but rather due to a complicated and lengthy system that is difficult to navigate. The current system requires extensive paperwork and long processing times, making compliance challenging. Rather than imposing additional fines on providers, which only exacerbates financial strain, we should focus on streamlining and making the background check system more accessible.

It is particularly concerning that the revenue generated from these fines was suggested to fund Early Learning Scholarships. This approach is deeply flawed—it essentially shifts funds from one struggling area of early childhood education to another, rather than addressing the root issue. Providers already face tight budgets, and penalizing them further only weakens the child care infrastructure instead of strengthening it.

I also want to take a moment to thank you for your continued attention to including providers in these important conversations. It is crucial that those of us working directly in child care have a voice in shaping policies that impact our ability to operate and serve families effectively. Your commitment to listening to providers and considering our perspectives is deeply appreciated, and I urge you to continue prioritizing our input as these bills move forward.

I urge you to consider the implications of these proposed bills carefully. Supporting legislation like HF1383, HF470, and HF2617 will contribute to a stronger, more effective child care system, whereas proposals like HF1915 and the background check fee increase will only create additional burdens and undermine the trust and viability of providers.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these critical issues. I appreciate your dedication to Minnesota's families and child care system, and I urge you to support policies that truly benefit providers, children, and families alike.

Sincerely,
Courtney Greiner

Courtney Greiner
Director/Owner
Mini Mos Child Care and Preschool
courtney@minimoschildcare.com
218.879.5035
2 Beth Ann Drive
Esko, Minnesota 55733



Via email

April 7, 2025

Dear Members of the House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of Learning Care Group (LCG), I am writing to express our concerns with the proposed language in HF2436 (A2) that addresses video security cameras in child care centers.

LCG is among the largest providers of high-quality early childhood education in the nation. In Minnesota, LCG proudly operates 26 child care centers, with 2 additional centers in the pipeline, under the Everbrook Academy, La Petite Academy, Montessori Unlimited, and Tutor Time brands. Each day, LCG schools have the capacity to serve more than 3,600 children and employs more than 500 educators and staff. Approximately 20% of the children we serve in Minnesota are served through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), off-base military care, and employer partnerships.

LCG appreciates the bill sponsors' focus on the safety of children in child care programs. We share the common goal of ensuring the safety of the children in our care remains the utmost priority, evidenced by our current use of cameras and our proprietary family communication tool. All of our child care centers (nearly 1,150 nationwide) have cameras in classrooms and on playgrounds (where applicable). The main purpose for these cameras is to allow families to better connect with their child care solution by being able to see their children throughout the day. During the COVID-19 pandemic, LCG launched a proprietary family communication app, "Sprout About," which allows parents to live stream their child's classroom while their child is in attendance.

While cameras and live-streaming has been a positive tool for our families and staff, we have also taken safety and privacy measures. Specifically, we only allow families to live-stream footage of their child's specific classroom and live-streaming is only available when their child is in attendance. We also impose safeguards to ensure live-streaming footage is only available to approved family members. Most importantly, cameras do not capture footage in sensitive areas of our centers, including bathrooms and diapering stations. While we were pleased to see that HF2436 includes some security and privacy safeguards, we worry that this language does not go far enough to ensure that such footage remains confidential for the safety and privacy of the children in our care.

Additionally, HF2436 would impose significant costs on child care centers, which would likely be passed on to families in the form of tuition increases. Such costs include, but are not limited to, the costs of security camera installation and/or upgrades, ongoing video retention, and staffing. Secured video retention is incredibly expensive, and the 60-day retention period will result in an unfunded mandate to providers. Extending video retention to meet this requirement would require expensive equipment installation, network upgrades, or additional remote storage, running into the thousands of dollars per location. In our experience, 7 calendar days is ample time to be notified of and locally retain footage in the event of an incident.

We respectfully request the committee consider a 7-day retention period, from the latter of: (i) date of the recording (including the date of); (ii) the date of self-reporting an incident (including one hour before and one hour following the incident); or (iii) conclusion of an inquiry or investigation from an agency with jurisdiction, when request for video is made within 7 days of the date of the recording or 7 days from the date of a self-reported incident. We also recommend



the disposal period be reduced to after 7 calendar days, unless the center receives notice from a law enforcement official of a suspected crime committed against a child at the center. Moreover, additional funding should be appropriated to cover equipment and ongoing costs (including retention costs) to ensure that providers are not forced to pass these costs onto the families they serve, making child care even more unaffordable for families.

Finally, we recommend the committee eliminate the video display resolution and frames per second rate requirements in the bill. While approximately 90% of our centers nationwide stream at 720p and about 10 frames per second, every camera is installed with the correct balance of video resolution and frames per second that is visible and permits streaming from multiple users without bogging down the school's network. The internet speed at a center, along with available bandwidth, also impact the decision to use certain resolution and frames per second. Requiring every provider to meet a common standard does not consider the uniqueness of every child care center, or the existing cameras that are in place in centers across the state, which could impose additional costs should providers have to upgrade their camera equipment. Additionally, when a large number of users are streaming simultaneously, the resolution and frame per second rate can drop, which could make a provider out of compliance with the bill's requirements unintentionally.

Thank you so much for the consideration of this feedback on HF2436. LCG looks forward to working with you to ensure Minnesota families have access to high-quality, safe, and affordable child care.

Sincerely,

Jenna Borkoski
Government Affairs Manager
Learning Care Group

NORTH COUNTRY



1011 11th Ave NE • East Grand Forks, MN 56721
Telephone 218.399.7356 • Fax 218.281.7374

www.northcountryfoodbank.org

April 7, 2025

Legislative Leaders:

As the executive director of North Country Food Bank in East Grand Forks, I am writing to respectfully request that you consider funding for hunger relief as you work on reaching an agreement on the budget.

North Country serves 21 counties in northwest and west central Minnesota. We have a large geographic service area that is very rural in nature. We work with 220 nonprofit agency partners across the region to feed hungry neighbors. Our sole focus is on feeding those struggling in our region.

Last year was the busiest in our history. Our distribution was up 17% overall, and the first quarter of this year we are up another 13% quarter over quarter. Our agency partners are still seeing visits by hungry neighbors increase anywhere from 20-30%. These are staggering numbers in the food bank world.

The record high and still increasing need, along with the significantly increased costs of food make it extremely difficult for us to keep up with demand with no assistance. We are doing everything we can to source and distribute food throughout our region, but there is just not enough food in the system to meet the rising demand. More funding is necessary, or additional food will simply not be available to hungry neighbors.

Unfortunately, there is no end in sight to the increased number of neighbors needing help. I regularly receive calls from agency and program partners regarding food and funding concerns. For example:

- A partner backpack program in Bemidji anticipated serving 350 children this school year, and ended up with more than 650 children on the program. They did not have the funding in place to serve nearly double the children anticipated.
- A mobile food distribution partner in Twin Valley contacted me with concerns about the number of families attending the distribution. It's a small town of about 700 people, but more than 150 families are showing up needing help.
- Agency partners that used to receive 1 food delivery from us per month are now requesting 2-3 deliveries per month.

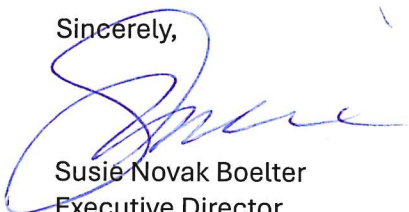
Community support and funding are key to helping make sure fewer neighbors have to go hungry. This is why we are requesting new, ongoing funding for food banks as part of HF 1112 / SF 1348. These funds would have a huge impact on our ability to provide millions of pounds of food to rural northwest and west central Minnesotans that would otherwise not be available

Additionally, our 52 food shelf partners are struggling with the ever-increasing demand. They also need your help. We are asking you to increase funding for the State Food Shelf Program, as described in HF 777 / SF 1112. This will help make sure that local food shelves have the funding they need to serve as many hungry neighbors as possible in our region.

Many times people in our region will say they don't hear much about the hunger issue. Perhaps, this is because we are well-positioned, experienced and adept at doing this work in northwest and west central Minnesota, and because we have largely managed the need on our own in the past. However, we are now sounding the alarm and advising that we need some help – and that the current, never-before-seen level of need is likely to exceed our capacity without additional support. Tens of thousands of our neighbors, family and friends are counting on you, and so are we.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Susie Novak Boelter
Executive Director

susie@northcountryfoodbank.org



Chairs and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House File 1148, the prepared meals food grant program.

My name is Lisa Lane, and I represent Open Arms of Minnesota. For almost 40 years, Open Arms has been preparing and delivering medically tailored meals to vulnerable, sick and food insecure Minnesotans. We prepare over one million meals per year in our metro area kitchens, and we deliver and ship those meals to thousands of Minnesotans in the metro area AND in rural counties who are both food insecure and living with life threatening illnesses like cancer, heart disease, diabetes and renal failure or they are struggling with high risk pregnancy and trying to ensure a healthy delivery and healthy baby.

The prepared meals grant we received last year enabled us to provide 24,000 meals in the past year to 109 Open Arms clients across Greater Minnesota and 1,000 meals weekly to M Health Fairview patients who are also both food insecure and critically ill.

All of the clients served by the prepared meals grant are more than 200% below the federal poverty guidelines, 25% of them are unhoused, 20% regularly sleep at homeless shelters, 30% are in remote rural areas and have unreliable transportation and the remaining 20% are referred to us from healthcare providers ranging from the Mayo clinic to Duluth.

Current data from Minnesota hospitals reveals the substantial burden of food insecurity among critically ill individuals in Minnesota is particularly acute:

- 67% of critically ill patients in Minnesota report food insecurity during treatment
- 82% of cancer patients experience nutritional challenges during treatment
- Approximately 28,000 Minnesotans undergoing active cancer treatment struggle with meal preparation
- 73% of critically ill patients report missing meals due to lack of energy to prepare food
- Medical facilities report a 45% readmission rate for critically ill patients who lack adequate nutrition support

- 89% of healthcare providers indicate that proper nutrition through prepared meals could reduce treatment complications

This bill ensures our most vulnerable residents have access to nutritious food. The success of House File 1148 impact on critically ill and food insecure Minnesotans will continue to significantly improve their malnourishment scores, treatment outcomes and recovery processes.

I strongly encourage and appreciate your support of this bill. Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.



April 7, 2025

Dear House Children and Families Committee,

I am writing to express gratitude for your support for HF1424 Kinship Licensing & Support in the Committee's omnibus proposal. Quality Parenting Initiative-Minnesota is an advocacy strategy to strengthen our foster care system. QPI directs practices and policies towards loving, developmentally informed parenting. Over the past few years, we have been intentional on recognizing the role of relative/kinship families and understanding how to better support them.

Areas within your proposal that we see directly having a positive influence on kinship families include requirements for relative kin to receive information and support to access desired resources for licensing and for their caregiving and allowing more time for relative kin to complete training requirements.

In the Fall of 2024, QPI-MN utilized its resources of data collection to gather information from county and community-based foster care licensors regarding licensing barriers. This feedback reinforced that relatives caring for children can be overwhelmed with their responsibilities, which leads to delays in completing licensing requirements. Additional barriers faced include limited free time, difficulty with paperwork, lack of access to technology, and mistrust of the system. Investing in the licensing and family support required to adequately meet the needs of relative-kin caregivers is achievable with these updates to Kinship licensing and support services.

Thanks for your ongoing support for families in Minnesota and recognizing the unique role that relatives and kinship families have in caring for their young family members and strengthening relationships with their parents.

Sincerely,

Kate Rickord, MA, LP, SEP
Director, QPI-MN
Kate@qpimn.org
612.619.0086 (direct)



April 7, 2025

The Honorable Nolan West & The Honorable Carlie Kotyza-Wittuhn
Chairs, Children and Families Finance and Policy
Minnesota House of Representatives

Dear Chairs and Committee Members:

The Minnesota Alliance of YMCAs representing seventeen YMCA Associations throughout our great State would like to submit this letter of support for **HF2436DE1** authored by West, Kotyza-Wittuhn, Norris, Tabke, Coulter, Pinto, Virnig, Kraft and Spencer-Mura - appropriation for early learning scholarships.

Childcare is crucial in Minnesota because it supports families' economic stability, enabling parents to work or pursue education and ensuring children receive the best quality care and are prepared for school. Early learning scholarships will provide resources to ensure that families can enroll and gain access to quality care.

The YMCA is the largest nonprofit provider of childcare in Minnesota. Over 2000 children per day attend early childhood YMCA programs throughout the state. 40 % of our daycare participants receive a scholarship so that they can participate in daycare. MN Alliance of YMCAs understand the importance of providing quality and affordable daycare for families. We understand that when families have access to affordable childcare, it allows parents to participate in the workforce, boosting the state's economy. Minnesota's economy loses \$2.1 billion annually due to the childcare challenges.

The Minnesota Alliance of YMCAs encourage you and the committee to approve **HF 2436DE1**, this important childcare appropriation for early learning scholarships.

Sincerely,

David Dominick
Director of Public Policy
Minnesota Alliance of YMCAs
1761 University Avenue West
Saint Paul, MN 55104



April 8, 2025

Dear Chair Kotyza-Witthuhn and Chair West,

We are writing today to thank you for your commitment to children, youth, and families in Minnesota and for taking the time to hear HF1660, the bill to conduct a statewide needs assessment for out of school time and youth programming.

On the behalf of the United 4 Youth campaign, we understand the budget challenges of this legislative session. While work continues to establish the next state budget for children and families in Minnesota, we are disappointed provisions from HF1660 were not included. We are hopeful they will be passed in the final agreement.

The United 4 Youth campaign launched because across the state, families shared that a lack of safe and enriching opportunities for youth is a top concern. Families are struggling with the approximately 2,000 hours of time youth have each year out of school, including many hours of the day that parents are working.

The demand for youth programming is high, and many families are out of luck if they cannot afford them. Congregations, mosques and other nonprofits are doing their best to provide safe spaces and youth activities, but there is still an enormous gap.

The youth programming needs assessment will help identify key challenges, policy solutions, and provide a roadmap for how Minnesota can build on the the assets we have to expand opportunities for youth.

Please let us know if you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration and all your work for children, youth, and families in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Brian Fullman
United 4 Youth