

# Letters and Testimony for HF 2266 (Sencer-Mura)

## HF 2266 Childcare Workforce Development Funding

Requesting Entity: YWCA Minneapolis

Contact Information:

- Stephanie Thomas, Vice President of Early Childhood Education, 612-215-4169, [stthomas@ywcamppls.org](mailto:stthomas@ywcamppls.org)
- Lee Friedman, Chief Financial and Operating Officer, 612-215-4142, [lfriedman@ywcamppls.org](mailto:lfriedman@ywcamppls.org)

1. When were state WFD or general funds first requested for this project? And how much workforce funding has this organization received?

The WFD program started in October 2016 and received first DA funding in 2016. Since then, YWCA Minneapolis has received nearly \$2 million in reimbursement for eligible program expenses.

2. What other sources of funding does YWCA WFD receive?

- Government Funding:
  - State of Minnesota - Pathways to Prosperity (P2P)
  - State of Minnesota - Transformative Career Pathways
  - City of Minneapolis
- Private Foundations:
  - Greater Twin Cities United Way
  - Target Foundation
  - Mortenson Family Foundation

3. Please provide a brief overview of the program seeking funding:

The YWCA Minneapolis ECE Teacher Training program provides participants foundational employment skills and trains and supports participants in obtaining a CDA (Child Development Associate) from the Council for Professional Recognition. This is a foundational credential in the early childhood field that qualifies participants to enter the field as early childhood teachers. The program can take up to 9 months to complete with participants going through 140 hours of training and professional development, 500 hours on classroom practicum, development of a portfolio explaining their professional philosophy and teaching, an outside observation of their teaching and a timed standardized computer test.

Through our work on timeliness, work ethic, relationships, and problem-solving, participants are able to establish and maintain employment. Cohort models are adapted to

meet the needs of participants based on preferred language, learning styles, or disabilities. Most frequently, participants meet individually or in small groups with the program instructor to ensure full engagement with the program curriculum and writing the portfolio.

4. How much is being sought in HF 2266/SF 2736?

\$350,000 per fiscal year/\$700,000 total biennial appropriation

5. Who participates in the program?

- Most participants have low incomes and low paying jobs. Wraparound services ensure that participants with low incomes have the resources they need to succeed in the program and in the workforce.
- Through years of program development and working to meet community needs we have been able to expand our program to Greater Minnesota. With the help of virtual meeting technology, we are able to serve participants in 11 counties and continue to reach new areas to support the need for early childhood teachers. Counties served have included: Anoka, Carlton, Carver, Cass, Dakota, Hennepin, Itasca, Ramsey, Sherburne, Washington, and Wright
- Several individuals with recent immigration experiences have gone through our program.
- We have served some disabled veterans in the program.
- Continued support will allow us to serve 120+ participants per grant cycle with 70% + (80-100) leaving the program with foundational skills to gain increased employment and 40%+ (50-60) earning a CDA and working in the ECE field.

6. Who will be served by the program and who will benefit from the project?

- Our littlest Minnesotans and their parents and caregivers will be the primary benefactors of this program from infants to pre-K.
- Participants seeking their CDA accreditation will be direct beneficiaries of this program. 55% of participants have dependent children and about 32% are single mothers.
- Participants who leave our program before earning a CDA still obtain valuable skills that help them enter the workforce with increased employment and application skills. Through our work on timeliness, work ethic, relationships, and problem-solving, participants are able to establish and maintain employment.
- Early childhood providers across Minnesota will benefit as they seek to fill vacancies for qualified teachers.
- Employers across Minnesota will benefit through increased high-quality childcare availability for their employees to remain in the workforce.

7. What are the key outcomes from the 2023-2025 direct appropriation funding?
- Over the 2-year grant cycle, we have supported 144 Teacher Training program participants.
  - Sixty-six have graduated with their CDA, and 18 more are on track to graduate by June 30.
  - Ninety participants have exited the program and gained full-time employment.

## Testimony in Support of Funding for YWCA Minneapolis' Workforce Development Program

To the Esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Lauryn Spencer, and I am writing to urge you to continue funding the YWCA Minneapolis' workforce development program. I speak not only as a proud employee of the YWCA, but as someone whose life was directly transformed by this program.

In 2022, I was a young, low-income mother with dreams of advancing in life and very few resources. I knew I wanted to expand my career in early childhood education, but the path felt out of reach. The cost of earning a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential was something I simply could not afford. But thanks to the YWCA's workforce development program, I was able to earn my CDA for free. That opportunity changed the entire direction of my life.

A few months after completing my CDA, I enrolled in college. The CDA gave me the confidence and motivation to keep going. I earned my associate degree this past May, and I'm now on track to complete my bachelor's degree by May 2026.

In April 2024, I joined YWCA Minneapolis as the Assistant Director of the South Early Childhood Education location. This month marks one full year in a job I absolutely love. I get to support children, families, and fellow educators in meaningful ways every day—and none of it would have been possible without that initial opportunity the YWCA gave me.

As a single mother, being able to advance in life and create a better future for my children means everything. That's why I'm so passionate about this program—not just because it helped me, but because I want others to have

the same opportunities I did. I love recommending this pathway to aspiring teachers who are just like I was—eager to grow but unsure how to take the first step. For many, without the YWCA, it would be unattainable. I know it was for me.

Please continue to invest in this vital program. When you fund workforce development at the YWCA, you are opening doors for people who are ready to work hard and build brighter futures. I'm proud to be living proof of what's possible.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Lauryn Spencer

Assistant Director, YWCA Minneapolis – South Early Childhood Education

March 31, 2025

03/31/2025

Macie Johnson

### YWCA's Workforce Development Program Significance

The YWCA's Teacher Training Program has allowed myself, and numerous others around the state of Minnesota, to grow in their knowledge and experience in Early Childhood Education for the betterment of children and families across the state. This has not only supported access for families to having quality educators for their children, but it has also thrust the importance of ECE into the spotlight for how essential this workforce is for the future of our nation.

I began my journey in Early Childhood Education in 2018 and had initially started an online CDA program that was self-led. While this was an option many chose to seek, it was not a fit for my learning style and it resulted in the allotted time frame being passed, therefore I began to explore other educational options. It was at that time where I learned of an online instructor-led CDA program through the YWCA. From the moment I began enrollment, I was welcomed with open arms and an excitement was ignited. The program discussion and reflective basis for many topics of Early Childhood Education, connected myself to these new concepts in ways I had not thought of prior. This CDA program tailors its instruction to meet the needs of a variety of learning styles through the online mediums, textbooks, and the additional resources it provides. I completed this program and became a Lead Teacher in the field. I built such a connection with this format and organization, that I was offered a position in 2024 within the YWCA Workforce Development Team to support other educators to be successful in their journey of becoming a lead teacher, just as I did.

The numerous supports and pathways to success this program offers is unique in its method and effectiveness. Assisting the participants in the program through a variety of learning tactics, financial support, discussions, and guidance on topics they can directly apply into the classroom, furthers the quality care children and staff need in Early Childhood Education. Providing our students financial relief with a gas or bus card is just a small way to monetarily help a participant alleviate stress to complete the program. The program also supports participants learning about variances, scholarships and ongoing education for participants of the program to supplement their wages which also uplifts morale and displays how, by educators continuing their professional growth, they can also become more financially stable as they work through the program and beyond.

Being able to expose people who are passionate in their communities about what a quality education looks like in practice, reinforces a workforce across the state of Minnesota that is both reflective in their practices, and explorative in the ways to keep improving their teaching strategies for the lives of children, families, and themselves. Allowing educators to ponder upon where their own teaching beliefs come from, the effect that had on them personally, supplements the educators being able to view how their own teachings and interactions with children will have a long-lasting impact on the success of these little learners in the future. The YWCA's CDA Program not only expresses the love and purposeful care children need to grow and thrive, but also how the educators working behind the scenes can receive that integral support as well for the betterment of all and the future leaders in this state.