

February 8, 2022

RE: Written Testimony to Senate Human Services Reform Finance and Policy Committee in Support of the CCAP Absent Day Policy (SF 2876)

Dear Chair Abler & Members of the Committee:

My name is Maria Snider, Director of Rainbow Child Development Center in St. Paul.

Rainbow is a family business. My mom opened Rainbow in 1998 and as a special part of our vision, we have chosen to serve children in a typically underserved community in St. Paul. To do that we participate in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). We are licensed for 63 children and 90% of our families utilize CCAP.

For years, we have taken a financial hit by choosing to accept CCAP and get paid far below the market rate while still providing high-quality care. We do this because **all children, regardless of their family's income, deserve access to a high-quality early childhood experience.**

Early in the pandemic, Minnesota made the right decision to waive restrictions on absent day payments from CCAP. This crucial policy supported providers, families, and our community by helping stop the spread of COVID-19. This policy also saved Rainbow from going out of business and allowed the families at our center, many of whom are essential workers, to continue to go to work and serve our community.

When schools in St. Paul were unable to teach children in person we opened a school age classroom with 15 children, all of whom participated in CCAP.

At Rainbow we have been very successful at combatting the spread of Covid 19 and have not had a single instance of covid spreading between children in the classroom. This is in large part because we continue to encourage our families to isolate themselves and their children when they are sick or considered close contacts. Families know they can keep their children home when they're sick without fear of incurring a large tuition bill they

can't afford. By covering the cost of tuition, we're able to pay our teachers and keep our center open.

We know that passing this temporary change to COVID-19 absent day policy will not cost the State any additional funding. According to DHS, the budget already established for CCAP will cover the cost of this proposal.

If CCAP absent days were not paid, we would be forced to close. Failing to pass this temporary change to CCAP absent day payments would:

- promote the spread of COVI-19 19 and other illnesses,
- pass along unfair costs to families who are already facing poverty,
- force childcare programs like mine to close—a tremendous loss for children, their families and loss of employment for teachers, and
- further discourage childcare providers from accepting CCAP and ultimately decrease access to childcare for families who are already underserved.

Rainbow joins with many other providers, teachers, and families across Minnesota to ask this Committee and the legislature to pass this common-sense provision to pay for CCAP absent days during childcare closures.

Thank you,

Maria Snider, Owner
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