



February 28, 2023

Dear members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Families First of Minnesota is seeing strong demand for Early Learning Scholarships across the 28 counties we serve. Even with \$5 million in additional funds provided late last year, we have nearly 400 children on waiting lists.

Our agency oversees the distribution of Early Learning Scholarships across 20 counties in southern Minnesota, 3 in the south metro and five counties in northern Minnesota. Because of a lack of funds, we generally are only able to provide scholarships for those the state defines as priority: Children of teen parent, those currently in foster care, those in need of protective services and those who have experienced homelessness in the last 24 months.

For the last couple of years we've been hopeful that the Legislature would increase funding for Early Learning Scholarships but our hopes have been dashed in the waning days of the session. This year, with a large surplus and a growing demand for workers across the state, we believe there has never been a better time to make an aggressive investment in Scholarships.

Additional funding for Scholarships would help more young children prepare for kindergarten and allow their parents to return to the workforce. That's a win-win investment! We'd also love to see expanded opportunity for infants and toddlers to gain the benefits provided by Scholarships.

There has never been a better time to eliminate waiting lists for Early Learning Scholarships. If not now, when?

Sincerely,

Jon Losness
Executive Director