

February 14, 2023

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing this letter in support of The Children's Museum of Rochester, Inc.'s bills, SF725 and HF1023. The Children's Museum of Rochester, Inc. is also known as SPARK.

SPARK is a museum near and dear to my heart, and it's a place where I enjoy spending time with my young child. For us, it's a time to explore and play while learning, together. My professional background has been in early childhood, and I am currently serving as the Early Childhood Family Services Manager for Rochester Public Schools. SPARK is a cornerstone in our community and through my lens as an early childhood advocate, a critical place for families of all different backgrounds to engage in learning and preparing for future success.

The programs at SPARK evoke creativity and wonder. Play enhances brain structure and promotes executive function, which is the process of learning. Children need to develop various skill sets to optimize their development and manage stress. Research demonstrates that developmentally appropriate play with caregivers and peers is a singular opportunity to promote the social-emotional, cognitive, language, and self-regulation skills that build executive function and a pro-social brain. Furthermore, play supports forming safe, stable, and nurturing relationships with all caregivers that children need to thrive. Children that have the opportunity to experience SPARK, even once, are working on these critical skills vital to being a successful learner in early childhood and beyond.

Our community needs access to SPARK, and these bills seek to provide funding that builds upon successful initiatives funded with previous appropriations from Minnesota Department of Education. SPARK would be able to provide access and engagement for diverse audiences through museum programs and exhibits that promote arts, culture, and history.

I encourage you to lend your support and leadership in passing SF725 and HF1023 for SPARK, the Children's Museum of Rochester, Inc.

Sincerely,

Erica Schumacher

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