

**Testimony In Support of SF 413, Secure Choice Program
State Government Operations
March 9, 2023**

Good morning Chair McEwen,

My name is Karin Swenson and I am the Executive Director of Meadow Park Preschool and Child Care center in Rochester. I have been in my current roll for 30 years and have been in this business far longer.

I'm excited to testify in favor of SF 413 (Senator Pappas), which establishes the Minnesota Secure Choice retirement program.

Running a childcare business is a really difficult practice. While I'm passionate about the kids we teach, the families we serve, and the teachers I hire....the margins are so thin and the public investment so low that we are in a prolonged and deeply troubling staffing crisis. Offering quality care is expensive, and families with young children can only afford to pay so much. That is why it's difficult for me to offer competitive wages and benefits to employees.

Unfortunately– right now – I can only offer an average wage of \$15.00 and no benefits except for paid time off. This is especially tough because childcare teachers are really the workforce behind the workforce.

For years I've wanted to be able to offer my employees more benefits – especially some type of retirement package. Nearing retirement age myself, I know how important it is to start saving early in one's career, that those years of savings and compounding interest can really add up; but they can also fly by fast if one is not planning. For my young teachers, I often encourage them to try to save for the future, but there has never been an affordable way to put money away for the future.

Secure choice would be a great new tool that my staff could use to start their retirement planning now. This program is a starting point, and I would love to see it eventually evolve to offer more options including provider match. Ideally, we will one day have a childcare system that will allow independent child care centers like ours the ability to participate in such a match as we work towards a system where early childhood educators are treated more like their peers in the K-12 system.

Thank you for letting me testify and I urge you to pass this important tool to help our childcare workforce. Maybe this system was a little too late for my generation, but hopefully it can help the next generation of workers.

**Thank you... Karin J. Swenson – Executive Director
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