



March 19, 2025

Senator Melissa Wiklund
Chair of the Minnesota Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Minnesota Senate Building
95 University Avenue West, Room 2107
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: Early Learning Scholarships Are a Wise Investment For Minnesota (Senate File 1049)

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

It is with great enthusiasm that we share our support for Senate File 1049 which maintains the current level of funding for Early Learning Scholarships! While we would like to see even greater public investments in this important program, we're grateful to this Committee for prioritizing infants, toddlers and preschoolers growing up in families with low-incomes – children who research shows benefit the most from high-quality early experiences.

Early Learning Scholarships are an integral part of Minnesota's early childhood care and education system, making quality child care and education available to more than 16,000 infants, toddlers and preschoolers each year. Allocating General Fund spending for these critical Scholarships is a wise investment not only in Minnesota's youngest members, but also in families, local communities and our State. Today's children are tomorrow's parents, caregivers, workers, and public servants.

The importance of and access to high-quality early childhood care and education is immense! Eighty percent of brain development happens during the first three years of life. By the time a child is two years old, children from low-income families can be six months behind their peers from high-income families in language processing skills and vocabulary. A vast body of research documents the numerous positive outcomes stemming from access to high-quality early childhood care and education, including: greater success in elementary school, increased high school and college graduation rates, and higher lifetime earnings.

CDF-MN advocates for children and families who have been pushed to the margins. Forty percent of Minnesota children who received an Early Learning Scholarship during Fiscal Year 2024 were from at least one of four priority areas: a child of a teen parent pursuing a high school or GED diploma, a child in foster care, a child in need of child protective services, or a child whose family experienced homelessness during the previous 24 months. CDF-MN has a long history of and commitment to making visible the well-being of young, homeless children. During FY24, 4,765 young children (30% of Scholarship recipients) receiving scholarships had experienced homelessness. Quality early childhood care and education programs, made accessible through Scholarships, can attenuate the adverse effects of homelessness, thereby positioning children to be ready to enter school, learn, and succeed.

Maintaining access to high-quality early childhood care and education programs for infants, toddlers and preschoolers with the highest needs should continue to be a priority for our State. We urge you to support Senate File 1049 and funding for Early Learning Scholarships. Thank you for placing the well-being of children and families at the center of your discussions and decision-making. We're grateful for your service.

Together For Children,

/s/ Alisha Porter
Children's Defense Fund – Minnesota
State Director

/s/ Alexandra Fitzsimmons, Esq.
Children's Defense Fund – Minnesota
Senior Policy Director