



March 19, 2025

Dear Chair Wicklund and Members of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee,

We are writing to express our support for SF 1049/HF 470, appropriating funding to maintain support levels for the Early Learning Scholarships (ELS) program. Greater Twin Cities United Way believes that access to quality and affordable early childcare sets the foundation for academic success, positive health outcomes and long-term prosperity. This is evidenced by years of investing in early childcare providers, participating in child care-centered coalitions, and centering early childcare education in our advocacy agenda. But more recently, we stepped into a new role in the early childcare ecosystem: central payment administrator for the Early Learning Scholarship program.

As the newly appointed central payment administrator, we have implemented key improvements that have strengthened the program and positively impacted the childcare providers and families it supports. Over the past eight (8) months, we have streamlined the payment process reducing administrative costs, ensuring timely and consistent payments to providers and programs, enhancing security measures, and facilitating the efficient collection of data to help demonstrate ELS program effectiveness and impact.

Our administration of the ELS payment system has added capacity to Area Administrators to provide effective, personalized case management for scholarship awardees. This has made it easier for families throughout the state to access vital scholarship funds, and connect to local resources, ensuring more children can thrive in high-quality early learning environments and at home.

Having established an effective and fiscally responsible system for scholarship payments, the primary constraint on the program's expansion and impact is the uncertainty of ongoing and sufficient funding. Investing further in this newly enhanced, proven scholarship program is a strategic investment in the future of Minnesota and the well-being of our youngest citizens. We urge you to recognize the positive impact of the Early Learning Scholarship program, and to support the passage of HF470/SF1049 so that we can someday proudly say that, in Minnesota, there is no waitlist for an Early Learning Scholarship.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Athena Mihas (Mar 19, 2025 11:54 CDT)

Athena Mihas
Chief Financial Officer



Stephannie L. Lewis
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