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Madam Chair and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Martha Njolomole, and I am an Economist at Center of the American Experiment. I am providing this letter to testify in support of the proposal in SF 2135 to modify the definition of education for childcare workers in licensed childcare centers.

Licensed childcare is relatively unaffordable in Minnesota compared to most states. This is mainly due to stringent regulations, such as educational requirements, that raise the cost of providing care and keep providers, as well as workers, out of the childcare industry. According to data from Childcare Aware, in 2023, Minnesota was the seventh most expensive state for infant center-based care in the country — as a proportion of median household income for a married couple family. The same was true for toddlers. Single-parent families spent nearly half of total median household income to keep infants in daycare in the same year.

Providers in Minnesota have cited having trouble finding workers, which forces them to operate below capacity or even go out of business. Not to mention, countless others likely never go into business, owing to our state's high standards. Broadening the definition of education could increase the pool of qualified individuals available and willing to work at daycare centers, thereby improving childcare availability and affordability. I urge this committee to support this bill.

Additionally, this committee could consider further changes, such as eliminating the post-secondary education credit requirement altogether and reducing the number of years of work experience that would-be teachers and assistant teachers must have before caring for children. Research evidence often suggests that what matters more for childcare quality is expertise in early childhood development, not necessarily the length of education. Post-secondary credits could be replaced with pre-service training in early childhood courses, as is done in a lot of other states.

All our neighboring states have relatively more affordable childcare, in part because they have more relaxed rules. In South Dakota, North Dakota, and Iowa, staff dealing directly with children, for example, must only meet age and training requirements. Childcare workers in ND operate under supervision, but supervisors only need to have a high school diploma and one year of childcare work experience. In Wisconsin, childcare teachers are only required to take two post-secondary courses. Moreover, a teacher is only required to have 320 hours of experience, not thousands. Minnesota could go in the same direction.

I appreciate your consideration, Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

Martha Njolomole

Economist

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