

- Thank you Madame Chair and Members. My name is Clare Sanford, and I represent the Minnesota Child Care Association. This is a statewide group of about 250 child care centers with members ranging from small, single location providers to large multi-site organizations. Thank you for this opportunity to comment.
- I would like to address two specific portions of the bill at hand: Voluntary Pre-K (VPK) and Early Learning Scholarships.
- Our association continues to support targeted funding for our highest risk young children over more universal approaches that focus only on the year before kindergarten and do not necessarily fund the children of most concern.
- While we felt that resources devoted to last session's creation of VPK would have been better invested elsewhere in early childhood, we were hopeful about the programs' implementation.
- Targeting funds specifically to low income children was an improvement, as was the possibility of a mixed-delivery system where families could access VPK services at a range of providers including public schools, child care centers, family child care, faith based programs, culturally specific programs, etc.
- A mixed delivery model also gives families the most options in terms of locations that meet their needs in terms of schedule, critical for working families.
- The initial implementation of VPK, however, has been disappointing.
- First of all, MDE is not able to tell us how many NEW children were served by these funds, and there was no prohibition on using the money for children already receiving pre-k services in districts.
- Second, after many community listening sessions the early childhood community was looking forward to implementation of a mixed delivery model. As it turned out, only lip

service was paid to this issue. Of all the districts funded, I believe only 2 are using a community partner, and in both cases it is Head Start.

- In fact, MDE described a glitch in the language regarding the calculation of poverty rates for potential community partners that effectively knocked districts who did apply with mixed delivery partnerships out of the running for VPK funds. District applicants and their partners had no idea this was the case. We are happy to see that this bill includes a revision that appears to fix that issue.
- Another concern is that VPK is called a targeted program, but only to a point. In the funds awarded this year approximately 22% of the children funded do not come from low-income families.
- Licensed teachers are also re-inserted into this bill as a VPK requirement. With no research to confirm that a license correlates to improved early childhood outcomes (there is research that correlates a BA degree for providers, a standard the early ed industry is working towards) we prefer the current language allowing for other paths of qualifying as VPK teachers that allow our field to keep the incredible diversity of staff we enjoy. 96% of licensed teachers are white, which does not reflect the low-income populations in our state.
- Finally, I'd like to clarify something in the Governor's fact sheet on expanding early childhood access and choice, which says that families using VPK will save MN families over \$11K/year in child care costs. This is misleading at best.
- Full-time, year-round center-based child care costs an average of \$11K in MN. This cost is for families using over 2200 hours/year. This is over six times more hours than the VPK requirement of 350 hours/year.
- An analysis of VPK applications found that programs were providing an average of 450 hours/year. That works out to an hourly cost of \$18.23. The community child care center cost per hour for pre-k services? \$5.03/hour. And those services are supporting working parents full-time, year round, not only on a school year schedule.
- A full-time working family still needs to pay for child care services other than VPK's 2.5 hours/day. This will cost families nearly as much as full-time programming in a

community program would. This will not equal child care savings for families other than those with stay at home parents or very part time/odd hour schedules.

- Finally, Early Learning Scholarships
- We are thrilled with the Gov's proposed expansion of eligibility to 0-5. That is the way to attack the achievement gap. This gap can be demonstrated as young as 18 months – we need to start earlier.
- But we also need to fund that expansion, which the Gov's budget does not do.
- Thank you again.