Dear Governor Walz and Lieutenant Governor Flanagan:

We are writing to thank you for your strong support for the early care and education (ECE) sector, and to ask that where there is flexibility with federal CARES Act funds you prioritize Minnesota’s youngest children by further bolstering the ECE sector. We also urge the Administration to apply an equity lens, using funds to the greatest extent possible to address opportunity gaps—which begin in the prenatal phase—by ensuring the most vulnerable children and families receive the most intensive supports.

One specific request is that the Administration set aside a portion of the $43 million in federal Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) grant resources to be used in support of the education of children under age 5. GEER funds were made available to support the education continuum from the early years through higher education, roughly spanning ages 0- to 22-years-old. Accordingly, we would respectfully ask that a minimum of 23% (or approximately $9.8M), an amount that corresponds to an even distribution by age group over the continuum, of the funding be used to support the education of children under age 5 via ECE programs.

We urge you to seize the opportunity presented by the GEER grant resources to invest in 1) Early Learning Scholarships for children of workers in critical sectors and/or in need of child welfare support under age 5; and 2) additional Peacetime Emergency Child Care Grants for providers. Both of those tools are direct and comparatively easy to distribute quickly, and both have bipartisan legislative support. Scholarships can help on the demand side of the crisis, and more emergency grants can help on the supply side — help on both sides of this crisis is desperately needed.

We appreciate the Administration’s acknowledgement and understanding that learning begins at birth, and the need to support that learning by investing in the ECE sector. As you know, even before the pandemic, Minnesota was facing an extreme shortage of quality ECE programs, with only two slots in quality programs open for every ten Minnesota parents of young children.

Since the pandemic hit Minnesota, this extremely grave shortage has unfortunately grown worse. A recent survey of Minnesota providers done by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) found that 55 percent could not survive more than two weeks without public support. Mass closures of ECE programs will obviously be devastating for Minnesota’s children, families, communities and economy.

The Peacetime Emergency Child Care grants recently enacted were a critically important lifeline for Minnesota’s child care providers. We are extremely grateful for your leadership on this, and your partnership with bipartisan members of the Legislature, and organizations like ours.

But while that was a very critical action, unfortunately it is not sufficient to stabilize the sector. Further, it is becoming clearer that lack of experience and relationships with banks and the Small Business Administration is likely to mean that few home- or center-based ECE programs will be in a position to take advantage of general CARES Act small business supports. If additional help isn’t forthcoming very soon, we fear we will see...
Minnesota’s child care sector permanently shrink. The subsequent damaging ripple effect this would have across Minnesota’s economy and society is difficult to overstate.

For those reasons, we urge you to seize the opportunity presented by the GEER grant resources to support Minnesota’s children under age 5. We are very grateful for all you have done for Minnesota families in need of early care and education. We look forward to working closely with you and your Administration to provide the additional assistance necessary to help the ECE sector survive this crisis, so that it can continue to help Minnesota children thrive, now and into the future.

Sincerely,