Advocacy for Children Day at Capitol & MinneMinds Bill Introduction
Hundreds of Early Childhood advocates rally at State Capitol while MinneMinds coalition announces support for bipartisan early childhood care and education bill

ST. PAUL, Minn. — A diverse group of over 700 children, parents, childcare providers, community leaders, advocates and lawmakers gathered in the Rotunda at the State Capitol yesterday, for what Sen. Carla Nelson shared with the audience was “the biggest rally at the Capitol so far this year”.

The event was held to give Minnesota children and advocates an opportunity to meet legislators, to celebrate the introduction of SF-1663 and HF1997, and to serve as a call to action for supporters of the movement to increase access to quality early development and education programs. The event began with a bipartisan group of Senators and Representatives reading to the preschoolers in attendance.

Andre Dukes, director of Curriculum and Instruction at Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ), opened the event by thanking the organizations and sponsors in attendance, and recognizing the progress made over recent years. Dukes noted “These organizations could have never made such progress without you,” while speaking to the group gathered in the Rotunda. Drawing on his experience at NAZ, Dukes continued by affirming the efficacy of early childhood programming.

Local parent TraNecia Sylvester echoed Dukes’ sentiments by recounting her positive experience with targeted home visiting, the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and early learning scholarships. Sylvester shared “these programs helped in my children’s early development, and allowed me the opportunity to pursue a career I love.” Sylvester added, “Early childhood investments are the most important investments our state can make.”

Rep. Jennifer Loon spoke of her long-standing support of investments in early childhood, urging the importance of allocating the budget in ways that bring “returns for all of us.” Melvin Carter, director of the Minnesota Children’s Cabinet, led an invigorating rendition of the ABCs, and encouraged all in attendance to make the most of their visit to the capitol by connecting with legislators in support of a recently-introduced bill.

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Sen. Carla Nelson, a former teacher who referred to education as “the great equalizer,” took the stage to give an overview of SF-1663, a bill which will increase access to early education scholarships for zero- to five-year-olds, and funds targeted home visiting for at-risk families from prenatal to age two. Sen. Nelson further stated that the bill empowers families to make the right choices for their children’s education, while aiding them in seeking and maintaining employment. Sen. Nelson shared, “Scholarships provide a two-generational solution, that’s what we’re looking for here. It closes the achievement gap, it reduces the looming workforce shortage, and helps families break the cycle of poverty.”

Rep. Peggy Flanagan shared with the audience that it is very important that the grown-ups that work at the Capitol think about the children in attendance when they make decisions, and that they make sure kids’ needs are met. Brief remarks by Rep. Ron Kresha, main author of HF1997, further encouraged attendees to raise their voices and speak to their elected officials. Daniel Yang, organizer for the Voices and Choice Coalition, spoke to the importance of programs for children that appropriately address the full needs of families of color and American Indian families.

Sarah Caruso, president and CEO of Greater Twin Cities United Way, gave closing remarks, thanking legislators for their bipartisan support of SF-1663 and HF-1997 and encouraging everyone in attendance to remain at the capitol to know their senators and representatives, and to show their support for early care and education.

About MinneMinds
MinneMinds is a coalition of organizations and thought leaders from across the state with a common commitment to prioritizing Minnesota’s youngest in-need children as the most important investment for our state to make. Supporters vary greatly in specific interest, size, and geographic reach, representing the education community, philanthropic organizations, business and non-profits. We are committed to equitable access to high quality, accessible and culturally competent early childhood care and education. Learn more at http://www.minneminds.org/

About Greater Twin Cities United Way
Ranked as Minnesota’s largest nongovernmental social services funder, United Way connects people and resources within our community to challenge and change systems—like Minnesota’s education and jobs gap—that limit our potential. Our mission is to unite caring people to build pathways out of poverty, thereby improving individual lives and the community. Learn more at https://www.gtcuw.org/ and about our 24-hour, statewide, multilingual information and referral service, United Way 2-1-1 at http://www.211unitedway.org/. Greater Twin Cities United Way serves Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Scott and western Washington counties. For more information call (612) 340-7400.

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Advocacy for Children Day was made possible thanks to partnership with

**Minnesota’s Future Allies:**

- Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children (MnAEYC) & Minnesota School Age Care Alliance (MnSACA)
- Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE)
- Minnesota Child Care Association (MCCA)
- Think Small
- Child Care Aware of Minnesota
- Minnesota Coalition for Targeted Home Visiting
- Minnesota Community Education Association (MCEA)
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- Minnesota Licensed Family Child Care Association (MLFCCA)