**POLICY HOUR- OCTOBER 4, 2016**

**PROGRESS ON LEGISLATIVE ITEMS PASSED IN 2016:**

**Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program-**The Minnesota Legislature allocated funding for districts, charter schools with recognized early learning programs, or a combination thereof to establish a voluntary pre-kindergarten program with the purpose of preparing children for success as they enter kindergarten the following year.

As part of Minnesota’s E-12 education system, voluntary pre-K will be required to meet E-12 program expectations and follow the same general set of rules regarding such items as MARSS reporting, STAR reporting, expulsion, monitoring and compliance, professional development, teacher evaluation, Q Comp, and inclusion of children with disabilities. Additionally, voluntary pre-K comes with its own set of high-quality program standards, such as providing instruction through play-based learning, coordinating appropriate transition to kindergarten, involving parents and families in program planning, and more.

This new funding will provide high-quality early learning programming to **approximately 3,300 4-year-olds at 74 school districts and charter schools in the first year.** Districts and charters were required to apply for funding by July 1st, 2016, and will provide programming during the 2016-2017 school year.

**The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)**-will be allocating the $500,000 approved last session for grants to communities to increase the supply of quality child care providers in order to support regional economic development outside the metro area.

Grant recipients must match state funds on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Grant funds must be used to implement solutions to reduce the child care shortage in the state, including but not limited to funding for child care business start-up or expansion, training, facility modifications or improvements required for licensing, and assistance with licensing and other regulatory requirements.

In awarding grants, the commissioner must give priority to communities in greater Minnesota that have a documented shortage of child care providers in the area. This is a one-time appropriation and is available until June 30, 2019.

DEED published a Request for Information (RFI) in the Minnesota State Register on August 29th, seeking public comment on several items related to the purpose of this grant. Comments were due on **September 23rd.**

**The Legislative Task Force on Access to Affordable Child Care** was created to review the loss of child care providers in the state, assess affordability issues for providers and parents, and identify areas that need to be addressed by the Legislature.

Representative Mary Franson and Senator Melissa Wiklund serve as co-chairs of this newly formed Task Force. The other members include: Senator Dave Senjem, Senator Carla Nelson, Senator Alice Johnson, Representative Peggy Flanagan, Representative John Persell, and Representative Tony Albright.

To date, the task force has held two meetings, and plans to meet monthly through December. They are required to submit a final report to the legislative committees with jurisdiction over child care issues and the governor by **January 15, 2017**.

So far, the task force has focused on an overview of the cost of care, and discussion of the regulatory infrastructure currently in place. Future topics are expected to cover training issues and the workforce. Along with invited presenters, each meeting offers opportunity for public testimony.

More information about the task force and its work (including all materials shared so far and meeting dates) is available at: <http://www.lcc.leg.mn/tfcc/members.htm>