



December 12, 2016

Members of the Minnesota Legislature
Minnesota State Capitol
75 Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senator Abeler,

Congratulations on your election to the Minnesota Legislature. As retired U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force generals from Minnesota, we have a deep respect for the many complex decisions that you will face in the upcoming legislative session. We write to draw your attention to an issue we believe to be both critical to our national security and requiring action from you and your colleagues.

In Minnesota, nearly 7 out of 10 young adults aged 17-24 are not qualified to serve in the United States military. No matter how patriotic and ready to serve, 69% of young Minnesotans cannot qualify for military service, largely due to three major reasons related to poor education, obesity, or a record of crime/drug abuse. **This trend is a significant threat to the strength of our U.S. Armed Forces—including the Minnesota National Guard.**

That is why more than 650 retired generals and admirals across the country (including 9 of us in Minnesota) have joined Mission: Readiness, a nonprofit, national security organization dedicated to ensuring that our young people are well-educated, healthy, and of high moral character. Whether or not a young person pursues military service, these attributes are critical to succeeding on virtually any path after adolescence.

As critical thinkers, we understand that reversing this trend will take thoughtful, strategic planning grounded in research. There is no “silver bullet” to reverse the three major factors that keep young Americans from serving, but one approach can come close. *High-quality early education and care is proven to prepare children for success in school and keep them from turning to crime.* Emerging research shows that successful programs can teach healthy eating habits and promote physical activity that can prevent obesity.

We believe that the education and support that our youngest and most at-risk children receive can compensate to a considerable degree for other deficits they may experience, narrow the gap with other, more advantaged kids, and improve their performance in school.

We urge you to work to build the consensus necessary to expand access to high-quality educational services for at-risk children. The Minnesota Legislature made significant, bipartisan progress to expand access and increase quality during the last legislative session but there is substantial work that must be done. Current estimates show that due to the high cost of high-quality programs, we are only reaching about half of the children who stand to benefit most from these early interventions.

Military equipment is important—planes, tanks, and ships are necessary to protect our interests. But the most precious resource that our Armed Forces have are its servicemen and women. We



ask you to prioritize high-quality early education to ensure that Minnesotans are qualified for productive citizenship, including military service, if they so choose.

We stand ready to assist your efforts to keep Minnesota and our Nation safe and strong for generations to come.

Very Respectfully,

Major General (Ret.) Rick Erlandson
U.S. Army
Maple Grove

Major General (Ret.) Rodney R. Hannula
U.S. Army
St. Paul

Major General (Ret.) Jerry E. Lang
U.S. Army
Sauk Rapids

Brigadier General (Ret.) Tim Kennedy
U.S. Army
Minneapolis

Brigadier General (Ret.) Nicholas Ostapenko
U.S. Army
Duluth

Brigadier General (Ret.) Jerald L. Engelman
U.S. Air Force
Detroit Lakes

Brigadier General (Ret.) Patrick Martin
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Pelican Rapids

Brigadier General (Ret.) Dennis W. Schulstad
U.S. Air Force
Edina

Brigadier General (Ret.) Harry Sieben, Jr.
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Hastings