



Dear Representative:

April 6, 2016

We write to you as proud Minnesotans, and retired generals of the nonpartisan national security organization, MISSION: READINESS MINNESOTA.

Our decades of service in the highest ranks of the U.S. military taught us that responding to the complex challenges of the future requires smart, strategic planning. We applaud your committee for its work this session to prioritize forward-thinking policies that ensure young Minnesotans have the foundation they need now to succeed later in life. **We write to encourage you to support a successful initiative, the Parent Aware Program, which will further strengthen the future of our youngest citizens—as well as the security of our state and nation.**

According to the Department of Defense, 71% of young Americans between the ages of 17 and 24 are unfit to serve in uniform, largely due to poor education, obesity, or a history of crime or drug abuse. These factors are already causing significant recruiting challenges and are poised to jeopardize our ability to respond to the threats of the future. A shrinking pool of eligible, fit, citizen-ready recruits also stands to test the ability of our National Guard to mobilize in response to manmade and natural disasters.

Today, nearly 1 in 5 high school students nationwide does not graduate on time. In fact, many do not graduate at all—and it is extremely difficult to join the military without a high school diploma. Even among young adults who do finish high school, almost 1 in 4 who seek to enlist cannot score highly enough on the military's exam for math, literacy, and problem solving to be able to join. This trend poses a serious challenge for our Armed Forces, but should be of concern to all corners of our society and economy.

Increasing the pool of eligible recruits should be a national security priority. In order to do that, we must ensure that our young people are receiving high-quality education, especially at a young age. High-quality early learning programs are proven to prepare children to start school ready to learn, improve early math and literacy skills, increase student performance, and boost graduation rates. Successful programs have been shown to deter youth from crime, and even reduce obesity rates by instilling healthy eating and exercise habits.

During our time in the military, we relied on high-quality training, instruction, and oversight to ensure accountability and positive improvement. Minnesota's Parent Aware program ensures these similar measures enhance early childhood education programs in centers, schools, churches, nonprofit organizations and homes across our state. We commend the legislature for its recent investments in early childhood education and urge you to ensure that these funds are supporting high-quality programs.

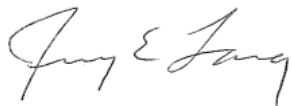
It is critical that the financial investment made by Minnesota taxpayers in early learning programs is being spent wisely. When the Department of Defense created its own early learning centers to serve military families, it made a commitment to quality, and Minnesota's civilian taxpayers should expect no less. **As you finalize your FY17 spending priorities, we urge you to prioritize a \$15 million investment in the Parent Aware Program.**

Very respectfully,


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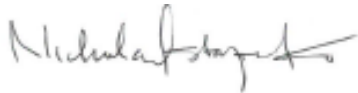

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