



Testimony – Senate Early Childhood Committee
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Good morning, Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Christina Macklin, policy analyst with the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits. We are a statewide membership organization representing over 1,500 nonprofits throughout Minnesota.

I want to thank the committee for restoring funding to critical programs like School Readiness, ECFE, Head Start, Community Education, Adult Basic Education, and child care. These programs, as you are aware, suffered significant cuts during the 2003 Legislative Session and we have been very concerned about the impact of these cuts on the people served by the nonprofits we represent.

However, early childhood programs and adult education were not the only services that paid the price for balancing the budget back in 2003. Programs and services assisting low-income Minnesotans and other vulnerable populations were prime targets. Health care became less accessible, affordable housing was undermined, MFIP cash grants were cut, at-risk youth were turned away from programs, and higher education costs increased, just to name a few of the consequences. And we are just beginning to feel the impact of those budget cuts.

Of course, this committee only has jurisdiction over funding for early childhood programs and adult education. However, my purpose, this morning, is to remind you that you may only have power over a single policy area, but a single Minnesota family might be affected by multiple policy committees.

Minnesotans who are working towards self-sufficiency must piece together a complex puzzle of supports to keep their families employed, housed, healthy, clothed, and fed. So, our concern isn't just easing the costs of child care or improving access to adult education, but also restoring eligibility for basic health care, avoiding reductions in the renter's credit, encouraging the creation of affordable housing, and increasing job training.

To that point, I've handed out copies of two documents that attempt to demonstrate how proposals from multiple committee areas impact a particular population.

The first document discusses the impact on families and individuals (www.mncn.org/doc/200607fam.pdf) and the second document focuses on impacts on our children and youth (www.mncn.org/doc/200607child.pdf).

We are trying to inform the policy debate by first laying out the context – what is the reality this population faces and what happened to them in the last round of budget cuts. We then discuss the specific budget proposals – both in a narrative and a spreadsheet format. And we will be adding the House and Senate proposals from this week shortly.

Of course, state legislators aren't the only policymakers making decisions impacting these populations.

What these documents don't show is that low-income families are under threat on all sides. In the U.S. Congress, House and Senate budget negotiators are currently working to come to a compromise budget resolution. And their choices could well lead to significant cuts to programs that serve low-income families, children, seniors, and persons with disabilities. The choices on the table include dramatic cuts to Medicaid, food stamps, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and others. Cuts to these programs would do profound harm to struggling families, and put additional pressures on the state budget.

And an example much closer to home is that Minnesotans in the metro area are facing rising transportation costs with a possible increase in bus fares and a reduction in routes.

The point is, the slow economic recovery from the recession may not have made things easy for state policy-makers having to balance the budget, but it also hasn't made it any easier for ordinary Minnesotans who are absorbing the impact of those budget-balancing decisions. Our families, our kids, even our single adults without kids, cannot continue to shoulder more and more of the burden.

So, we greatly appreciate the restoration of cuts happening in your committee as one of the pieces needed to provide some relief for our children, low-income families, and other vulnerable populations. But we hope you will consider how these same Minnesotans will be impacted as you sit on other committees and ultimately vote on the omnibus bills.