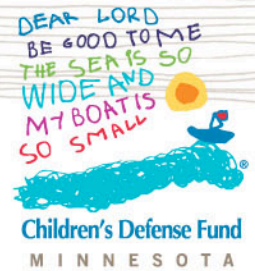


## PRESS RELEASE



**Date: January 23, 2012**

### **Minnesota's Youngest Citizens Remind Lawmakers about the Importance of Early Investments**

ST. PAUL, MINN– Some of Minnesota's youngest citizens visited the Minnesota State Capitol today. Dressed in onesies and t-shirts with messages about what their future might hold (Future MN Dad, Future MN Teacher, Future MN Engineer, Future MN Doctor, Future MN Job Creator, Future MN Artist, Future MN Senator), infants and toddlers, ranging in age from 4 months to 2 years, reminded lawmakers about the importance of investing today in Minnesota's future parents, workers and leaders.

"Addressing the needs of Minnesota children, especially infants and toddlers at risk for poor health and educational outcomes, is critical to ensuring a highly-skilled workforce and spurring economic growth," said Amy Crawford, regional director of Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota (CDF-MN). "Children must have the opportunity to experience the joys of being a child - free from poverty, homelessness, abuse and neglect - while developing the skills and building the knowledge necessary to succeed in childhood, and later in adulthood." "Too often we separate childhood from adulthood. As a result, we forget that life is a continuum and that the investments we make today not only have an immediate impact on the life of the child, but a lifelong impact on the child's life and our state."

"We must ensure that our future workforce is well-equipped to build a vibrant economy and support a growing population of new retirees and seniors," said Crawford. According to the Minnesota State Demographic Center, the percentage of Minnesotans age 65 and older will increase greatly during the next 20 years. By the 2020s, the growth rate of Minnesota's labor force will be at record-low levels. The ratio of workers to retirees will fall from the current rate of five per retiree, to four per retiree in 2020 to three in 2030. "It is imperative that Minnesota provide all of its children with the building blocks necessary for cultivating future skilled workers," said Crawford.

Today, tens of thousands of Minnesota children and their families are struggling. Research demonstrates that living conditions associated with poverty - including homelessness, neglect, and undiagnosed and untreated parental mental illness - are stressful to a child's development. These experiences can create toxic levels of stress in a child's developing brain, and impede their ability to grow and develop healthfully. However, smart, cost-efficient measures can have a marked improvement on a child's future success. "When we look at the numbers - the fact that 192,000 children are living in poverty, for example - it is easy to get overwhelmed. There is, however, good news. Research from a variety of disciplines and real

world practice experience is showing us how to improve outcomes for children, and how to do it in a cost-effective and efficient way,” said Marcie Jefferys, public policy director of CDF-MN. “We can offer help to families who we know are facing substantial stressors likely to have a harmful impact on their child’s development.” Nearly one in ten mothers, for instance, reports experiencing depression in the year of their child’s birth. And assistance levels in the state’s cash assistance program leave families in deep poverty. Both of these circumstances can be highly stressful for young children’s development.

“The 2012 legislative session begins tomorrow and we don’t have a moment to lose. One year is a significant amount of time in a child’s life, especially during early childhood when the foundation for future learning is being laid. We can’t wait any longer to pass legislation ensuring that Minnesota’s youngest members have access to critical early intervention services. We are talking about cost effective services that have the research proven ability to improve a child’s developmental outcomes,” said Alexandra Fitzsimmons, legislative affairs and advocacy director of CDF-MN.

CDF-MN’s 2012 legislative agenda includes the following policy proposals aimed at improving the well-being of Minnesota children most at risk of developmental delays and poor outcomes:

Increasing access to early intervention services for infants and toddlers at risk of developmental delays because of abuse or neglect;

Increasing attention to the well-being of children involved in the child protection system;

Reducing the incidence of maternal depression and its impact on children;

Improving the well-being of children in families receiving Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) assistance;

Addressing the well-being of homeless and formerly homeless children while working to end child homelessness; and

Strengthening the economic security of children, their families and Minnesota.

“We are excited to have strong, bi-partisan support for our policy proposals aimed at improving the well-being of Minnesota children,” said Fitzsimmons.

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