

Comments Prepared for the Michigan State House of Representatives Education Committee
“Supporting a Transition Toward Requiring that Children Be 5 Years Old by the First Day of
Kindergarten”

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Thank you Chairwoman Lyons and members of the Education Committee, for the opportunity to speak to you in support of House Bills 4513 and 4514. My name is Daniel Epstein and I am the Director of Government Relations for Learning Care Group. Learning Care Group is the second largest private provider of childcare in the country, and we are headquartered right here in Michigan. We have approximately 1,000 schools and employ about 17,000 people. But, most importantly, we offer high-quality early childhood education to approximately 100,000 children each day, about 5,000 of whom are Michiganders. Their educational success is our highest priority.

That is why we have spent millions of dollars designing and implementing a high tech, research based curriculum that utilizes continuous assessment and we have established a culture in which educational quality is reinforced at every level. But as good as we are at what we do, once children leave our schools to enter kindergarten, we depend on the public schools to help those children succeed. For that reason, we need good public school policies in place, so that, ultimately, Michigan’s children can compete in an increasingly expansive marketplace.

Michigan is one of only three states in the country with a harmfully low minimum kindergarten starting age. That low minimum kindergarten starting age should be changed for a number of reasons.

First, according to federally funded, independent research by the Rand Corporation, pushing back the minimum kindergarten starting age by as little as three months significantly improves test scores in math and reading, and *especially* so for children from low-income families. Therefore, keeping the threshold at December 1st keeps Michigan’s children from achieving their full educational potential.

Second, Michigan is one of 45 states that agreed to adopt the Common Core State Standards. Because of that, Michigan’s students will be expected to meet essentially the same standards as children in the other 44 Common Core states, and *our* children’s performance will be compared to the performance of the children in those other 44 states. However, our students will be competing at a disadvantage because each grade cohort will be an average of three months younger than comparable grade cohorts in other states which have already made it necessary for children to be 5 years old on the first day of kindergarten. Three months does not seem like a big difference, but the research shows us that children who start kindergarten when they are just that little bit older do better on tests right away and long after they have left kindergarten. In short, unless we change the minimum age, Michigan’s students will be competing at a disadvantage against students in other states. It will reduce their life opportunities and, in aggregate, will reflect poorly on Michigan’s education system.

Third, House Bills 4513 and 4514 will save the state approximately \$2 billion dollars over the next decade-and-a-half, much of which will start accumulating immediately. By putting that money to use Michigan could, among other things, transform its early childhood education system from one of the nation's most underfunded to one of the nation's highest performers. Especially in this time of unprecedented budget challenges, securing such a source of savings and using it to benefit children would pay off exponentially as a long-term investment in our future.

Finally, House Bills 4513 and 4514 do not harm children who are ready to start kindergarten before the age of 5. The bills create a waiver process that allows parents and schools to work together to exempt younger children who are ready to start kindergarten. So for parents of children with birthdays between September 1st and December 1st, these bills do not restrict their options. Rather, it gives them tools to do what is right for their own child while at the same time doing what is right for Michigan's children overall.

At Learning Care Group, our highest priority is to promote learning and children's overall development. The families that we serve trust us to educate the most important people in their lives, and we take that responsibility seriously. We also care about the well-being of children generally, even after they leave our schools. That is why I am compelled to ask that you *do the best thing for Michigan's children by passing House Bill 4513 and 4514.*

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I stand ready to work with you to continue to promote the well-being of Michigan's children.