

‘People are desperate’: Walz holds roundtable to discuss Minnesota's limited rural child care

In terms of a free falling child care industry, lawmakers have pointed fingers at different causes — with members of the Republican Party mostly blaming over-regulation and draconian agencies for the decline, while Democrats largely paint the issue as a lack of funding and public sector support.

Written By: Gabriel Lagarde / Forum News Service | Jul 10th 2019

LITTLE FALLS, Minn. — Discussions took on something of a bleak tone when the plight of families — particularly young, rural and working parents — came up during discussion.

“People are desperate,” said Christine Gesme of Harmony House of Little Falls, who noted she no longer adds more parents to her waiting list of 150 families. “I’ve had people asking me when was a good time for them to get pregnant. That’s real and that’s a real odd conversation. What do you tell these families who just want to work and raise their children?”

Gov. Tim Walz, flanked by Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, visited the Initiative Foundation in Little Falls Wednesday, July 10, to host a gathering of elected officials, government heads, child care providers, nonprofits and other experts. They aimed to invigorate an ongoing (and some members would say, decades long) discussion about how to address the issue of child care.

“This is a key issue of economic growth,” said Walz, who noted the state economy has a return of \$12 for every \$1 spent on child care. “This isn’t just a nice thing to have, it’s a necessity for hiring, retaining and recruiting an effective workforce.”

The United States is approaching a labor crisis as younger generations struggle to care for children and work at the same time, Walz said, while baby boomers continue to age out of the workforce without ready successors.

And the answer, members of the roundtable discussion observed, while often complex and difficult to quantify, looks to rest in the hands of private-public partnerships between government entities and small business entrepreneurs with a knack for child care.

“We need to step back a bit, take the blinders off and say ‘OK, what really works here? What are some creative solutions,’” said state Rep. Ron Kresha, R-Little Falls.

Walz spoke of collaboration — often framing the issue in terms of “streamlined programs,” “private-public partnerships” and “upstream thinking.” Urging greater Minnesota towns to reject the idea they’re little more than “broken Minneapolis,” Walz said the problem takes on different dimensions in rural communities, where overwhelmed day cares are few and far between, often entailing a roughly two-hour round commute for working parents.

In turn, child care, he said, forms the root of many societal ills — everything from employers struggling to find available workers, to a precipitous population decline, to overcrowded prisons filled with neglected children who became broken adults.



Gov. Tim Walz (upper, second from the right) speaks during a discussion roundtable intended to tackle the issue of child care in rural Minnesota. The gathering, hosted Wednesday, July 10, at the Initiative Foundation in Little Falls, brought together law makers, day care providers, nonprofit heads and others to brainstorm solutions for a problem with ramifications for nearly every aspect of society. Gabriel Lagarde / Brainerd Dispatch



Matt Varilek (left), CEO and president of the Initiative Foundation, speaks with Gov. Tim Walz minutes prior to a roundtable discussion Wednesday, July 10, on rural child care at the Initiative Foundation in Little Falls. Gabriel Lagarde / Brainerd Dispatch

According to data provided by the Greater Minnesota Partnership, the status of child care in rural areas of the state is dire — evidenced by a 27% decline in child care providers statewide between 2006 to 2015. This, while nearly 74% of families with children below the age of 6 have both parents in the workforce.

Lawmakers have pointed fingers at different causes — with members of the Republican Party largely blaming stifling regulations and draconian agencies for this decline, while Democrats largely paint the issue as a lack of funding, which trickles down to narrow profit margins, overwhelmed providers and underpaid caretakers.

Marcia Schlattman, the program manager of childhood development organization Milestones, said more than two-thirds of Minnesota providers report it's a struggle to find worthy candidates to work as caretakers — most of whom are college educated, but often garner \$12 per hour and no benefits.

“We need 37% growth in licensed child care to meet the shortfall,” Schlattman said. “If we are going to have the best and brightest people seeing to our children’s needs, we need to look at how our communities and policies provide support.”

Little Falls, the seat of Morrison County, represents a critical area of concern. As the county reported in early 2018, no less than 20 of its then 110 child care providers closed their doors between 2017 and 2018 alone.

Crow Wing County hinted at a similar conundrum that year as well, as reports indicate affordable housing and accessible child care are the primary reasons why more than 8,000 people were able, willing and want to join the labor force, but unable to for other extraneous reasons.

Republicans call for deregulation

During the meeting, Kresha called for the Walz administration to push for less restrictions, monitoring and punitive measures for day cares across the state.

“Governor, we have got to take some of those regulations off,” Kresha told Walz. “We have got to stop rule-making. We have to stop rule-making our child care providers out of business. We have to trust the fact that child care providers are going to take care of their kids.”

In related statements, Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka — who did not attend Wednesday’s roundtable discussion — echoed Kresha and lambasted how state agencies have handled child care inspections in the past.

“We’ve made a good start on streamlining training requirements for child care center employees and reducing fix-it tickets for unnecessary violations like ‘spikey grass,’ plungers located near a toilet, and bicycle wheels in a yard for play,” Gazelka wrote.

“We also established a Family Child Care Task Force that will provide Department of Human Services with a better perspective on what discourages child care providers, many of them female-owned businesses, from starting up or expanding. I look forward to continuing to work on child care issues in the coming session.”



Gov. Tim Walz (left) chats with Little Falls Mayor Greg Zylka minutes prior to a roundtable discussion Wednesday, July 10, at the Initiative Foundation in Little Falls. Discussion members looked to tackle the issue of child care in rural Minnesota. Gabriel Lagarde / Brainerd Dispatch



Gov. Tim Walz shakes hands Wednesday, July 10, with the young son of Initiative Foundation President Matt Varilek. Walz and Varilek joined a panel of child care providers, experts, lawmakers, nonprofit leaders and others to discuss the dire state of child care in rural Minnesota and potential solutions. Gabriel Lagarde / Brainerd Dispatch

Legislature needs to find help for state's child care 'deserts'

Lack of providers is a worsening problem, especially in Greater Minnesota.

By Editorial Board Star Tribune | FEBRUARY 21, 2018 — 6:04PM

It was an offhand comment, yet too important to ignore. State Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka volunteered to reporters at a pre-session briefing last week that among the concerns his fellow Greater Minnesota Republicans intend to bring to the 2018 Legislature is “day care” for young children.

Gazelka’s mention is a welcome acknowledgment of a worsening problem: Across the state — and particularly in Greater Minnesota — licensed child care is either insufficiently available, unaffordable or both. What has long been a headache for families is becoming a threat to the economic well-being of entire regions, as a lack of child care impedes the state’s workforce.

The severity of the problem has been quantified by two organizations: one state, one national. By the count of the Mankato-based [Center for Rural Policy and Development](https://www.ruralmn.org/a-quiet-crisis-minnesotas-child-care-shortage/), (<https://www.ruralmn.org/a-quiet-crisis-minnesotas-child-care-shortage/>) Greater Minnesota’s licensed child care providers served nearly 16,000 fewer children in 2016 than in 2006. Though [birthrates](https://mn.gov/admin/assets/mn-births-yet-to-rebound-to-prerecession-level-popnotes-nov2014_tcm36-219637.pdf) (https://mn.gov/admin/assets/mn-births-yet-to-rebound-to-prerecession-level-popnotes-nov2014_tcm36-219637.pdf) in Minnesota dropped after the Great Recession, that’s a larger decline than can be explained by population change.

The loss of capacity among home-based providers is driving that decline. Minnesota had 30 percent fewer in-home licensed child care providers in 2016 than it did 10 years earlier. The same study found a modest increase in capacity in center-based child care statewide. But that growth occurred primarily in the Twin Cities and regional centers.

The dearth of center-based child care in Greater Minnesota is the prime reason Minnesota was rated the most afflicted with “child care deserts” among eight states examined by the [Center for American Progress](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2016/10/27/225703/child-care-deserts/) (<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2016/10/27/225703/child-care-deserts/>) in 2016. The center defines a child care desert as a ZIP code with at least 30 children under age 5 and either no child care centers or so few that there are more than three times as many children under age 5 as there are spaces in centers. By that definition, 67 percent of Greater Minnesota qualified as a “desert.”

In Greater Minnesota communities, those numbers translate into trouble attracting and keeping workers with young children at a time when skilled labor is in short supply. Jon Radermacher, the Little Falls city administrator, experienced the problem personally when he was hired two years ago from Madison, Minn., only to discover that there was no licensed child care available for his then-infant son. His wife and child stayed behind in Madison for three months until a new provider opened in Little Falls — “making me one of the lucky ones,” Radermacher told reporters at a briefing by the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities.

“We have to start taking some measures to address this. This is an economic development issue,” Radermacher said. “If we’re going to attract young families, they need a safe place to take their kids.” Licensed care, which complies with state quality



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Minnesota's Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka. One of the concerns that he and his fellow Greater Minnesota Republicans intend

and safety regulations, is often the only care parents who are new to a community will trust, he added.

Gazelka and other legislators are right to take note. But they ought to be closer to agreeing on a remedy. Republicans such as Sen. Bill Weber of Luverne, whom Gazelka credited with raising the issue with him, say that the state's regulatory burden is too heavy, pushing family child care providers out of business and discouraging others from starting.

DFLers note that today's child care shortage was a predicted consequence of major cuts in state child care subsidies to working-poor parents in 2003. Despite the economic recovery since then, those cuts have never been fully restored. Last session, the Republican-controlled Legislature spurned DFL Gov. Mark Dayton's call for a subsidy increase large enough to make, on average, half of the licensed providers in the state affordable to subsidized families. Today's subsidies are pegged to the prices charged by the lowest-cost 25 percent of providers.

In January 2017, a bipartisan legislative [task force](https://www.lcc.leg.mn/tfcc/meetings/Child%20Care%20Report%202017.pdf) (<https://www.lcc.leg.mn/tfcc/meetings/Child%20Care%20Report%202017.pdf>) recommended a “both/and” solution to the child care shortage — more funding and less cumbersome regulation. Its recommendations didn't go far last session. But Gazelka's comment shows that the issue now has legislative leaders' attention. Minnesotans should let their legislators know that this year they expect not just notice, but shortage-easing remedies.

OurTown56345 data compiled, identifies key values of residents

Amanda Rasinski

Sep 26, 2020

The Little Falls City Council reviewed a presentation, Monday, with information compiled from the community outreach process Our Town 56345, with a goal of envisioning the 2020 to 2030 decade.

The Our Town 56345 Steering Committee spent months working with focus groups and taking surveys to compile a list of key assets, issues, challenges and goals for the future of the community.

Those findings set focus points for the three-day event held in February where the community was encouraged to offer their thoughts on the future of Little Falls.

“Through the Our Town 56345 listening process six guiding principles were consistently named, mutually held views, to shape civic decision making,” noted the presentation.

Those six principles identified that 56345 residents value children, culture and art, the environment, economic opportunity, being a welcoming community and strengthening Little Falls as a healthy community.

The presentation, led by City Administrator Jon Radermacher, noted an “exceptionally high” turnout for the community listening process. The six clustered themes were created in the community input process which allowed for focused commentary and will be used to guide the city in projects in the future.

Supporting the next generation, protecting natural resources (especially the Mississippi River, hospitality, supporting health and wellness, reinforcing the economy and building creative assets) will all be considered in the future development of Little Falls.

The presentation detailed that these themes can be supported in a variety of ways.

To support the next generation, OurTown56345 found that developing programs to nurture youth, supporting strong schools and supporting families are a high priority.

The community input process found in valuing natural resources, the residents of Little Falls “envision becoming known as a River City.” The presentation noted becoming a river city means having a vibrant waterfront with local arts and foods encouraging others to visit the area as well as those who live there to enjoy it. Part of that also includes supporting local bikes and trails, which also plays into the health aspect of the vision for the future.

OurTown56345 identified that residents want a healthy community encouraging outdoor recreation, supporting local agriculture and healthy food choices valuing health care.

Supporting the economy went hand-in-hand with some of the other values of the community. The presentation noted affordable childcare, affordable housing and workforce transportation were just a few ways to create a strong economy in the area, which also plays into the community value of supporting families and children.

Providing resources for entrepreneurs and igniting tourism were other ways OurTown56345 noted residents thought the economy could improve, but also that support in local foods and a vibrant riverfront.

Hospitality was identified as a value, not only to encourage families and new residents to stay in the area, but also encourage tourism by presenting as a welcoming and inclusive community.

“If we are successful, we will be known as a community where everyone has a sense of belonging. Any family seeking to put down roots will be equally welcomed,” noted the presentation.

The community also identified a strong value in local arts and culture, which plays into supporting the economy with local business as well as encouraging tourism.

One goal with that is to become known as a vital community in which arts and creativity build pride of place.

Radermacher said this presentation served as an introduction of the findings from OurTown56345 and the council and community will be able to offer input before anything is adopted or approved.

In other business Monday, the Little Falls City Council:

- Adopted final assessment of public improvement project 383 and public improvement project 386 after no objections at the public hearing;

- Approved equipment updates for Great River Television to continue operations for about \$12,000;

- Approved a repayment extension to the West Side Bar while waiting for insurance funds;

- Authorized a capital improvement commitment of \$85,000 to the Friends of Linden Hill for roof repairs at the Weyerhaeuser house; and

- Approved an agreement with Morrison County for the reconstruction of Fourth Street Southeast.

The next meeting of the Little Falls City Council is Monday, Oct. 5, at 7:30 p.m.

A work session and public forum will precede the meeting which will be livestreamed via YouTube.



“I hope this can be utilized for our community for a long time and not just a plan that sits on the shelf,” he said.

Amanda Rasinski

Staff Writer





212 Third Ave. N., Suite 310
Minneapolis, MN 55401
612-338-3023 office
612-338-4596 fax
FirstChildrensFinance.org

April 23, 2021

Congressman Peter Stauber
U.S. Congress
461 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Re: City of Little Falls
RFP-Rural Community Facilities Program Account
Letter of Support

Congressman Stauber:

On behalf of First Children's Finance, please accept this letter of support of the City of Little Falls, Minnesota in their application for funding to build a child care facility.

First Children's Finance is a nonprofit, 501c3 organization that for the past 30 years has worked to build the supply and financial sustainability of excellent child care in Minnesota. We focus on the business side of child care, providing training and consultation services to individual family child care programs and child care centers, as well as working with rural communities to assess and address their local child care needs. Our work necessitates cooperation and collaboration with other child care stakeholders and as such we are well positioned to provide this letter of support.

First Children's Finance, in conjunction with the Initiative Foundation, has been working with the City of Little Falls over the past two years to address the dire need for child care in their community. The funding being requested by the City of Little Falls to construct a child care facility serving at least 100 children will go a long way in addressing the need in their area and allow parents to freely join the workforce knowing their children are well cared for. Employers may also benefit from a potential increase in workforce.

Thank you for considering the City of Little Falls' proposal. Please feel free to contact us with questions. We can be reached at teris@firstchildrensfinance.org or suzannep@firstchildrensfinance.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Teri Steckelberg".

Teri Steckelberg
Business Development Manager
First Children's Finance

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Suzanne Pearl".

Suzanne Pearl
Minnesota Director
First Children's Finance



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Little Falls, MN 56345

P 320.632.5441
chistgabriels.com

Congressman Peter Stauber
461 Cannon HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

April 23, 2021

Dear Congressman Stauber,

This letter of support is in support of federal funding for childcare in the Little Falls, MN area.

According to the Initiative Foundation in Little Falls Minnesota, our State is now confronting one of the worst child care shortages anywhere in the nation, with more than four children under age five for every available child care center slot. Though the state has long had one of the country's highest rates of workforce participation among parents with young children, a recent study from the Center for American Progress found that more than 3.8 million Minnesotans are living in a community with fewer than one child care center spot for every three kids who need it—a condition defined as a “child care desert.”

While that trend is troubling, it doesn't even factor in the precipitous decline in the total number of licensed in-home family child care (FCC) operators—the child care option most rural parents depend on—which has dropped by more than 25 percent in the last decade. While nearly 5,000 new child care center slots in Greater Minnesota have helped to answer the need, the disappearance of more than 20,000 family child care positions has created a net loss of more than 15,000 child care openings in the state's rural communities.

CHI St. Gabriel's Health sees this as an important need in our community. It not only affects our employees but children in our area. Child care is a real concern and we are asking for your help in addressing this issue.

We look forward to working with the City of Little Falls to combat this issue and working with you on federal funding and information.

Sincerely,

Steve Smith - CEO - CHI St. Gabriel's Health -815 2nd St SE -Little Falls, MN 56345

(320) 632-9255
405 First Street SE
Little Falls, MN 56345



ifound.org

April 23, 2021

Congressman Peter Stauber
461 Cannon HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Stauber,

The Initiative Foundation is a regional community foundation that supports the community and economic development needs of the 14 counties, 163 cities and two sovereign Tribal nations of Central Minnesota. We were established in 1986 (in response to the Farm crisis) to provide grants, gap lending, technical assistance and resource referral to the leaders of our region. The challenges and opportunities that confront our service area have changed over time, including the depressions following 9/11 (in 2001) and the housing bubble (2008), as well as “good challenges” associated with the need for more skilled workforce (as we lead Greater Minnesota in job creation). As our state prepares to restore economic growth following the COVID pandemic, one of the biggest challenges is lack of access to quality, affordable, economically sustainable child care.

According to analysis by the Center for Rural Policy, central Minnesota currently has 15,393 child care slots, but demand or need for 27,534 slots, or a shortfall of more than 12,000 children. This shortage is especially acute in more rural areas, where many home based child care facilities closed their doors during the pandemic. If we are not able to provide child care it will provide an additional drag on economic recovery as many parents (often women) are unable to return to work.

The City of Little Falls has been exploring solutions with a variety of partners for nearly five years, recognizing that a community that can attract and retain young families is one posed for growth and vitality. A second dynamic unique to Morrison County is its proximity to Camp Ripley Regional Training Facility, which creates additional demand (often on weekends or for extended shifts) from parents fulfilling their duty to the National Guard. Carol Anderson, director of Morrison County Community Development Corporation has often noted that lack of child care is the single greatest barrier to economic development in the region.

The Initiative Foundation strongly supports the request from the City of Little Falls to provide financing for a regional child care facility, and will continue to provide grant support and technical assistance (largely business plan development and analysis by First Children’s Finance, a Community Development Financial Institution which focuses exclusively on child care). We



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Little Falls, MN 56345



are also providing grant support to Pine Technical and Community College (Pine City) and St. Cloud Technical and Community College so that any student seeking the Childhood Development Associate (CDA) certificate can complete this credential at no cost – thus assuring entry level workers for the child care sector. We expect these twin offerings to graduate at least 50 workers by the end of summer, at which time we'll be working to add additional 'rungs to the professional development ladder" to continue to enhance the quality of child care workforce.

ifound.org

Thank you for your support for this critical issue of rural development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don R. Hickman".

Don R. Hickman
Vice President for Community and Workforce Development





April 23, 2021

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in support of the City of Little Falls' request for federal funding to help build a child care facility in the city to address the unmet child care need faced by its residents, and its employers and their employees. We have worked closely with the city over the past several years to address this need, and to date neither support from within the community nor from the State of Minnesota has been sufficient to close the remaining financial gap necessary to address the shortage.

For a community like Little Falls, a lack of an adequate supply of child care creates significant economic impacts that go beyond affecting just the family who cannot get the care they seek. When employers try to hire new employees, if a candidate is not available in the community, then the employer must recruit talent from outside the community. Unfortunately, too frequently for employers in Little Falls, when an employee candidate is unable to secure child care they opt not to relocate to Little Falls, making it extremely difficult for employers to fill critical job vacancies. When companies consistently lose candidates due to a lack of child care in the area, eventually the employer will have no choice but to relocate or expand somewhere else. Unfortunately, because of the child care shortage in Little Falls and Morrison County, this is a scenario that occurs too often.

The funding requested by the City of Little Falls will close the gap that exists, thereby allowing the city to finally build the child care facility that is needed to address the community's needs.

Thank you for considering this request.

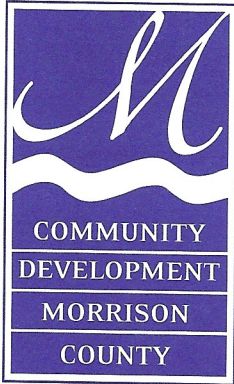
With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Scott H. McMahon".

Scott H. McMahon
Executive Director

*The Greater Minnesota Partnership advocates for public policies and investments
that stimulate prosperity throughout Greater Minnesota.*

525 Park Street, Suite 470, Saint Paul, MN 55103



April 24, 2021

Congressman Peter Stauber
461 House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

Dear Congressman, Stauber:

I am writing this letter in support of funding for a childcare facility to be located in Little Falls, Minnesota. This would be a facility that would be utilized by employees and service people of Camp Ripley. As you are aware, the lack of affordable childcare is holding people back from entering the workforce. It is particularly difficult for people how are in the National Guard as they can need childcare at odd hours.

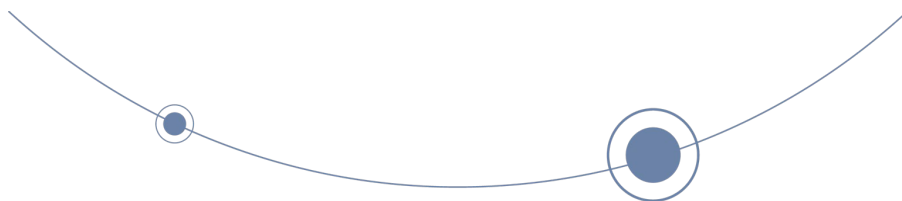
The cost of childcare paid by parents, while high, is not enough to service the debt on the facility and pay employees. Without financial support from government, it is impossible to construct and operate a childcare facility. I would hope that you would support funding for a facility near Camp Ripley that would benefit the children and employees in the Little Falls area.

Thank you for you time and efforts in this matter.

Sincerely,

Carol Anderson
Executive Director

316 East Broadway ~ PO Box 356
Little Falls, Minnesota 56345
T (320) 632 . 5466 / F (320) 632 . 2583
mcdc@fallsnet.com



April 23, 2021

Congressman Peter Stauber
House of Representatives
461 Cannon HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Stauber,

Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) is a high-performing, regionally-focused partner providing community development, economic development and transportation initiatives in central Minnesota. Our programs are strategic and resilient in nature, and contain an inclusive and collaborative approach, with an emphasis on local foods/agricultural and renewable energy economy. We are committed to helping the region respond to challenges by implementing strategies that expand the focus within regional economic development and local Comprehensive Plans to include pandemic response strategies, as well as diversifying technical assistance and other opportunities offered to small businesses. R5DC harnesses the power of regional collaboration to collectively raise the economic prospects of our region.

The City of Little Falls has been exploring solutions for the shortage in childcare over the past 4 years. Increasing access to quality, reliable and affordable childcare will serve our region well, increasing access to additional workforce, increase economic development and improving the quality of the life in our region.

The R5DC strongly supports the request from the City of Little Falls to provide financing for a regional childcare facility and will continue to provide grant support and technical assistance (largely business plan development and analysis by First Children's Finance, a Community Development Financial Institution which focuses exclusively on childcare).

Thank you for your support for this critical issue of rural development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Cheryal Lee Hills'.

Cheryal Lee Hills
Executive Director

Bridging Relationships & Resources

200 1st Street NE Suite 2, Staples, MN 56479 | 218.894.3233 | regionfive.org



April 23, 2021

TO: USDA – Rural Development – Rural Community Facilities Program Account

To Whom It May Concern,

Please consider this letter of support as you evaluate the project form for the Little Falls, MN childcare facility submitted by city administrator Jon Rademacher. Jon and his city have worked tirelessly to create more access and more affordable options for childcare facilities in his city and surrounding area. This facility would help to close the gap on accessible childcare opportunities for the city of Little Falls and greater Morrison County area. As a strong supporter and partner of the city of Little Falls, we strongly encourage you to fund this request.

Sincerely,

Paul Drange

Director of Regional Programs – Sourcewell

218-895-4134 paul.drange@sourcewell-mn.gov



803 Roosevelt Avenue • P.O. Box 1108 • Detroit Lakes, Minnesota 56502-1108
(218) 846-7400 • www.rmcep.com • www.facebook.com/RMCEP

April 24, 2021

Congressman Peter Stauber
300 3rd Ave NE
Cambridge, MN 55008

Dear Congressman Stauber,

I'm writing to express strong support for the City of Little Falls application to the USDA's Rural Community Facilities Program for funding to construct a childcare facility.

Rural Minnesota CEP, Inc. (RMCEP) supports the desperate need for more reliable, affordable, quality daycare so that young parents can join the workforce. The City of Little Falls' proposal would create 100 new daycare slots which would make a significant difference for families in our area.

RMCEP respectfully asks for your support for the City's application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vicki Leaderbrand MS".

Vicki Leaderbrand
Executive Director
Rural Minnesota CEP, Inc.
218-847-0718
vickil@rmcep.com

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oasiscmdirector@outlook.com • <https://oasiscentralmn.org>

April 24, 2021

Dear Congressman Stauber,

This is a letter of support regarding the development of high-quality childcare resources for Morrison County, Minnesota. Additional accessible, quality childcare resources are critically needed in our community. The impacts of access to quality childcare provide lasting benefits for families and children, especially those living in poverty and crisis.

Oasis Central Minnesota is a non-profit organization that provides food and housing resources – including emergency shelter, in Morrison County, Minnesota. Annually, our organization serves more than 150 households with just over half of those that experiencing homelessness, both in our community as well as the State at-large, being minor children. Individuals and families experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity are able to access case management services through our agency to assist with obtaining permanent, stable housing; securing employment; and connecting to other community support resources. One of the largest barriers to families looking to secure employment is lack of access to childcare resources. When families are able to access quality childcare and secure employment, the benefits are not only increased financial security for the family, but also a stable, caring environment that can nurture development for young children. In fact, for some families in crisis, their childcare provider may be the only stability; providing a safe place, meals, and a nurturing environment.

I would like to thank you for your work to improve the lives of Minnesotans and your assistance to help Morrison County achieve its self-identified goal of increasing childcare resources. Should you have any questions that I can answer or if you need any further information, please feel free to contact me by email at: oasiscmdirector@outlook.com or by phone at 320-632-9140.

Sincerely,

Rose Surma
Executive Director



April 25, 2021

Representative Pete Stauber
8th Congressional District
Minnesota

RE: Letter of Support for Childcare Center

Dear Representative Stauber:

Greetings from the Little Falls Area Chamber of Commerce!

My letter today is in support of a USDA Rural Community Facility grant for the City of Little Falls to construct a childcare facility. As a Chamber of Commerce, we have been discussing the lack of childcare opportunities in our area that is prohibiting the growth and expansion of workforce for several years. Something needs to happen to get our labor force back!

The lack of childcare has reduced our workforce by taking one parent out of the available labor pool, has influenced other potential employees to not locate in our area and it is suspected that families are turning to unlicensed childcare to fill the vast need for care, especially for overnight hours.

Please lend your support to the requested \$1.5M for a childcare facility in Little Falls.

Sincerely,
Debora K. Boelz
President/CEO
Little Falls Area Chamber of Commerce



**FY22 Ag, Rural Development Community Project Form
Pete Sauber (MN-08)**

Name of Project: Childcare Facility

Project Address: Little Falls, Minnesota

Agency/Account: USDA – Rural Development – Rural Community Facilities Program Account

Request funding in support of the Childcare shortage issues in Little Falls, MN.

Little Falls is a rural community with a limited number of positions with benefits, unless you have childcare. Tourism is in jeopardy as the mansions, museums, and lodging/resturant facilities must remain closed or work with very limited staff. These are **hospitality positions** and COVID has diminished our workforce and the need for childcare facilities is the key to employment in Little Falls.

This directly impacts the economy. Stores have shorter hours, museums are closed, hotels have very few staff and must work current staff longer at little to no pay to remain open for customers. **This directly impacts tourism.**

Little Falls needs access to reliable, affordable; quality childcare is the main barrier for parents in Little Falls seeking to enter the workforce. Our community has a critical need for workers, and by increasing the availability of childcare, hundreds of capable, productive employees could enter the workforce. **This is connected to tourism as the facilities that need staff are closed, due to lack of childcare.**

Goals: Increased childcare capacity, providing more eligible people to enter the workforce in our community.

Point of Contact: Jon Radermacher, jonr@citylittlefalls.com, 320-616-5500, 100 7th Ave NE Little Falls, Minnesota 56345

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristina Vonberge".

Kristina Vonberge
Executive Director
Little Falls Convention and Visitors Bureau
606 1st Street SE
Little Falls, MN 56345
320-266-7627
Littlefallsmn.com



April 25, 2021

To whom it may concern:

This is a letter of support from The Little Falls Business Association to The City of Little Falls. We support this application as business owners and as business employees of this City. Daycare is something that is in very high need in this City. Any support and opportunity that there is to be had on this topic would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you very much,

Molly Nelson

President of Little Falls Business Association



23 April 2021

Congressman Peter Stauber
461 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Stauber,

I'm writing to express strong support for the City of Little Falls' application to the USDA's Rural Community Facilities Program for funding to construct a childcare facility.

For the past 18 months, I have been involved with a local initiative known as Our Town 56345. Through this initiative, we collected public input on the most important needs for our community. I led the listening sessions and heard the same thing over and over: we desperately need more reliable, affordable, quality daycare so that young parents can join the workforce. The City of Little Falls' proposal would create 100 new daycare slots which would make a significant difference for families in our area.

On behalf of the many voices who took part in the Our Town visioning sessions, I respectfully ask for your support for the City's application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Susan L. Prosapio'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'S' and a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Susan L. Prosapio



Is the funding requested by a governmental or non-profit organization? (please choose one)

Governmental

If there are additional costs necessary to complete the project, have those funds been secured? None

Does the entity plan to make grants to other entities from the funds provided and if so, to which entities? No

What are the community benefits to this project? Increased childcare capacity, providing more eligible people to enter the workforce in our community.

Has any funding for the project been included in any presidential budget and if so, how much, which fiscal year, and in which agency or agencies and program(s)? No

Has the project received federal funding before and if so, how much and when and from which agency or agencies and program(s)? No

For rural development projects, is the project for an eligible use and does it meet all eligibility requirements under current law? Yes

For ReConnect requests, please provide relevant information, such as the number of households, businesses, or farms that would be served, what the performance of the service to be offered will be, and whether healthcare or educational facilities will be served.

Please attach to this submission as many letters of community support as practical.

Sprout MN is a 501c3 food hub organization located in Little Falls. As we continue to collaborate on advancing economies, one recurring barrier to entering the workforce for employees is access to affordable and reliable childcare. Sprout MN fully supports this request.

Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Arlene Jones".

Arlene Jones, Executive Director

arlene@sproutmn.com

612.695.2721