Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Education and Innovation Policy Committee:  
 My name is Molly Hughes, and I am a licensed Family Child Care provider in Coon Rapids, MN. I am writing to ask you to oppose HF46, and to make sure it is not included in the Omnibus bill. As a family child care provider, it would obviously be bad for my business if the four-year-olds that would usually attend my program left to attend a universal pre-k program.

Of greater concern, though, is the lack of research showing that this type of programming would be able to create positive change in early education. Many young children struggle when they enter Kindergarten, for a variety of reasons, across a variety of developmental domains. Some may not be as prepared as teachers would like academically, but many are also not socially or emotionally prepared to be in a formal school setting all day, every day. Starting children in a formal academic setting at a younger age will likely set them up for increased feelings of failure, rather than increased success.

Though this program has been describe as optional, allowing parents to choose if they want their child to participate, the program is set up with an element of peer pressure. Parents often struggle with making choices about how to “best” raise their children. They use many sources for information about child development, education, and many other parenting topics. It is easy to see how parents might think that if other children are attending full-time preschool, their own child may be behind in a later formal school setting if they choose a less formal setting such as a family childcare, even if they truly believe a less formal setting is appropriate for their child. The design of the program also implies to parents a “one best choice” because if a variety of programs were considered equally able to prepare children for formal schooling, they would all be included in the “free” offering to families.

Using a program such as this to help close the achievement gap misses the mark by offering equal opportunity to all children, rather than increasing support to children and families who may be at-risk, and would benefit from additional supports. Targeting services to families from birth, or even before, would make a far greater impact.

Overall, at this point, I would like you to oppose HF46, and ensure that it is NOT included in the Omnibus bill. It is not written in the best interest of children or families, and ultimately, is not in the best interest of our state.   
Sincerely,   
Molly Hughes