



# children's defense fund minnesota

Dear Members of the House Education Finance Committee:

**As you begin deliberations on HF 786, Children's Defense Fund Minnesota appreciates the opportunity to share our strong support.** CDF-MN is committed to ensuring every Minnesota child has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. Comprehensive, holistic, culturally-grounded afterschool and summer learning opportunities for young people are essential to achieving that vision.

Children's Defense Fund - Minnesota's Freedom Schools program provides summer and after-school enrichment through a research-based and multicultural program model that supports K-12 scholars and their families through five essential components: high quality academic and character-building enrichment; parent and family involvement; civic engagement and social action; intergenerational servant leadership development; and nutrition, health and mental health.

**At CDF-MN, we have seen how important culturally relevant learning opportunities are for Black, Indigenous and students of color.** In our work with Freedom Schools, we have been able to hire staff that reflect the community, develop curriculum and pedagogy that allow us to better center the experience of students, youth and their families. It's important to invest in organizations that are grounded in Black, Indigenous and communities of color that can provide programming that uplifts the strengths, assets and talents of their children.

**While programs like Freedom Schools are more important than ever as youth and families navigate COVID-related academic and social-emotional challenges, the needs far outstrip the available funding.** During the Covid-19 pandemic afterschool programs have played a critical role supporting distance learning, providing care, supporting young people's social and emotional well-being and connecting young people to devices, technology and food. The lack of robust state investment has hampered our ability to meet children and youth in their communities through afterschool and summer programming. Despite a robust body of research that quality afterschool programs narrow existing opportunity and achievement gaps, an estimated 219,277 school-age children in Minnesota are alone and unsupervised during the hours after school. Children and youth rely on these opportunities to be connected to caring adults and be engaged in culturally relevant learning – which also supports success in school.

***We encourage you to join us in support of HF 786 to provide the additional state funding needed to ensure more youth receive the support of after school community learning programs.***

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