Help working families afford child care and higher education

The opportunity to succeed is built on education. That’s why AFSCME supports investment in education from early childhood through college.

**Student Loan Forgiveness** – Students should be able to get a college degree without graduating with a mountain of debt. But Minnesotans – including many AFSCME members – owe an average of $32,000 in student loan debt. Our union supports a package of bills to limit the cost of college, refinance debt and forgive loans. We’re asking legislators to require public employers to promote a federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. Individuals who enroll in the program and work in public service for 10 consecutive years, while keeping current on their student loan payments, can have any remaining debt erased.

**Child Care Assistance** – For Minnesota parents, the cost of child care can be more than the cost of tuition at a state college. For example, the high cost of center-based care is about $14,000 a year, while home-based care is less than $8,000. The problem is that some AFSCME child care providers are charging less because parents can’t afford to pay more. To help solve that problem, the state should fully fund the Child Care Assistance Program and eliminate the waiting list so providers can serve 7,000 more families. The Dayton/Smith proposal invests $28.3 million in this initiative with funding to increase provider payment rates and remove red tape for parents and providers.

**Paid Parental Leave** – AFSCME is part of a coalition calling on the Legislature to pass the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act. The legislation would create an insurance program to provide all Minnesota workers with a portion of their pay for up to 12 weeks for pregnancy and medical leave, plus 12 weeks for bonding with a new child or caring for a seriously ill family member. In addition, the Dayton/Smith budget proposal guarantees six weeks of paid parental leave for state employees. The employer-paid benefit would save the average worker $6,200 and give mothers and fathers priceless time to bond with a new child.

**Action – Ask your legislators to:**

- Promote awareness of student loan forgiveness programs [SF 2487 (Dahle) / HF 2576 (Murphy)].
- Support the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act [SF 2558 (Sieben) / HF 2963 (Metsa)]
- Fund the Child Care Assistance Program and increase provider payment rates.