



January 31, 2018

Missouri State Capitol
201 West Capitol Avenue
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Dear Legislator,

We write as retired generals, members of the national security organization Mission: Readiness, and Missourians, to respectfully urge you to support HB 1420 (Pfautsch), which would extend the sunset date for an early learning quality assurance three-year pilot program. Research has shown that ensuring young children have a strong start in life can generate many benefits in the years to come, including preparing more young people to serve our nation.

According to the Department of Defense, 71 percent of young people between the ages of 17 and 24 in Missouri, and nationwide, are ineligible for military service, primarily because they are too poorly educated, too overweight, or have a disqualifying record of crime or drug abuse. These factors are already causing significant recruiting challenges, and are poised to jeopardize our ability to respond to future threats.

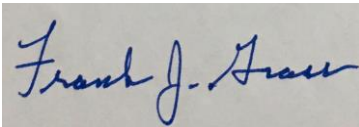
Currently, nearly one in six young people does not graduate from high school on time. On top of that, nearly one in four young people who graduate from high school and take the required military entrance exam -- the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test -- cannot score highly enough to join. While this trend poses a serious recruiting challenge for our Armed Forces, it should be of concern to all sectors of our society.

In order to address this growing problem, we must ensure that our young people are receiving a quality education, especially at a young age. High-quality early learning programs are proven to prepare children to start school ready to learn, improve early math and literacy skills, increase student performance, and can even boost graduation rates. Successful programs have been shown to deter youth from crime, and some have reduced obesity rates by instilling healthy eating and exercise habits.

During our time in the military, we relied on high-quality training, instruction, and oversight to ensure accountability and positive improvement. The voluntary early learning quality assurance pilot program in conjunction with the Missouri Head Start Collaboration Office and the Departments of Health and Senior Services, Mental Health, and Social Services is a step in the right direction to ensuring that the young people of Missouri grow up citizen-ready and have the option of serving in the military if they choose.

The Department of Defense made a commitment to quality in its own early learning centers serving military families, and the people of Missouri should expect no less. The Missouri members of Mission: Readiness support the extension of this important early learning quality assurance pilot program, and respectfully urge you to do the same.

Very Respectfully,



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Columbia



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