



children's defense fund minnesota

Chair Melissa Wiklund and Members of the Committee
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
95 University Ave W, St Paul, MN 55103

February 13, 2023

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Committee,

I'm May Esperanza Losloso, the Community Engagement Director for Children's Defense Fund – Minnesota. I am also a member of the Community Solutions Advisory Council. Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color are driving our state's population growth. Yet too often, solutions designed to address Minnesota's persistent opportunity gaps within these communities – gaps that start before birth - are ineffective because they do not invest in and harness the critical asset of culture and community.

The Community Solutions for Healthy Child Development grant program is backed up by a growing body of research that documents the power of culture and community for creating healthier children and families. Investing in BIPOC solutions must be a critical component of our state's effort to end the devastating lifelong impacts of child poverty. Of the 143,000 Minnesota children living in poverty last year (about 3.5 times Twins Stadiums full), 62,000 (43%) lived in extreme poverty, growing up in families earning less than \$12,963 per year. Communities have the solutions that build on their cultural strengths but are too often denied the resources to implement them.

As a member of the Community Solutions Advisory Council, I have followed and supported the journey of grantees from their applications to the challenges of implementation, and finally to exciting gains and promising practices. The council is a unique entity because we are all members of the community, and we are key accountability partners with the Department of Health. We ask hard questions and keep the grantees in mind when thinking about how agency processes could be more equitable. We are affecting change in other agencies. For example, staff from the Departments of Education and Human Services observed our RFP and grant selection processes and have adopted those learnings in their work.

I urge you to support Senate File 402. Sustained funding over time will allow communities the opportunity to refine their solutions, extend their reach, and ultimately set up this generation of children for success. Thank you.

Sincerely,

May Esperanza Losloso
Community Engagement Director
Children's Defense Fund – Minnesota