



Children's Dental Services

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Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Committee,

Children's Dental Services (CDS) thanks the Governor and Lt. Governor for including the Community Solutions for Healthy Child Development Grant Program in their Department of Health budget bill SF2995 and encourages the committee to follow suit by including SF402 in the Senate Health and Human Services Omnibus budget bill. This important and historic program focuses on improving measures of well-being for children of color and American Indian children in Minnesota from prenatal to grade 3 through a community and equity-centered approach.

Since 1919, CDS has been dedicated to improving the oral health of children from families with low incomes by providing accessible treatment and education to our diverse community. The Community Solutions grant program has enabled CDS to expand its comprehensive dental treatment and education programs, as well as incorporate wrap-around services, such as providing culturally-tailored care and education surrounding opioid and substance use disorder and its effects on one's oral health. Under this grant program CDS has been able to provide treatment and education for over 3,000 American Indian, Somali, Hmong, Karen and Latinx children and pregnant women and people across Minnesota. Despite this generous and important funding, CDS care providers continue to see immense disparities in access to care for the at-risk communities it serves compared with affluent communities. This, coupled with the ongoing opioid epidemic and changing cultural landscape means that providing necessary, culturally appropriate, community accessible dental care remains a top priority.

More than ever, we want to ensure every Black, Indigenous and person/child of color and their families in Minnesota are valued in systems and in society in a way that allows for them to have equitable access to vital oral health as well as comprehensive health care that celebrates and affirms their cultural background, race, ability, and experience so that they have the opportunity to thrive and live their healthiest lives. It is time to increase the state's investment in community solutions and listen to the voices of community members who for too long have said that solutions for significant challenges facing children and families should come from communities closest to those challenges and that the path to success is to leverage local assets to make meaningful change.

As you weigh various proposals, we hope you will join the Governor and Lt. Governor in giving this innovative program the permanent funding needed to fully deliver on its promise (SF402). Minnesota has the need and Minnesota has the resources. We need to leverage more community led solutions beyond the pilot group of project funding opportunities as a sustainable way to support children and families. Children's Dental Services strongly supports these bills.

Thank you,

Erianna Reyelts
Associate Director
Children's Dental Services