



Senator Melissa Wiklund
Chair, Health and Human Services Committee
1100 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 23, 2023

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee,

We are La Red Latina de Educacion Temprana (La Red), the Latino Early Child Care Providers Network in Spanish, and are writing about the inclusion of the Community Solutions Fund grant program in SF 2995. We testified in support of SF 402, which sustainably funds the Community Solutions Fund grant program out of the Minnesota Department of Health, which you have already discussed in your committee. We received the Community Solutions Fund grant in 2020.

La Red is a group of Latina leader founded in 2013 that are making healthy changes that benefit children and members of the Latino community living in Richfield, Bloomington and across Minnesota. We develop community-driven solutions to support healthy child development and early learning opportunities for children whose families choose or need child care from a family member, friend, or neighbor. We do this by providing cultural early childhood trainings, capacity and leadership development for Latina childcare providers to deliver the highest quality child care possible and support school readiness.

Our work has also changed the lives of the FFN providers by changing their understanding of their role from "just babysitting" to knowing that the work they do is important to the children's future and our entire community. We have worked to support other family, friend, and neighbor networks across the state to help build their capacity, and are leaders at the National level supporting FFN networks. The Community Solutions grant program has supported us to provide monthly trainings for family, friend, and neighbor providers, develop our curriculum, provide free summer soccer activities for young children, supporting our families throughout Covid.

This grant's program is different from other state grants we have received. We feel like the state is acting as a partner with us and learning from us. The advisory committee that oversees the work is really interested in hearing what we have to say, and in supporting what the community needs. Other funding from the state should learn from Community Solutions Fund to better support our communities. However, this grant program is time limited and hasn't been able to fully fund all of the work that's needed across our communities. We need ongoing funding to support communities to lead on the work they know will impact the health and wellbeing of their children. Please include the Community Solutions Fund grant program in your Health and Human Services omnibus bill.

Sincerely,

Ruth Evangelista – Co-Founder La Red
Faviola Martinez de Estrada – Co-Founder La Red