

March 21, 2023

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Committee,

The Community Solutions Fund advisory council thanks the Governor and Lt. Governor for **including the Community Solutions for Healthy Child Development Grant Program in their Department of Health budget bill SF 2995 and encourages the committee to follow suit by including SF402 in the Senate Health and Human Services Omnibus budget bill.** This program, among the first in the nation, focuses on improving measures of well-being for children of color and American Indian children in Minnesota prenatal to grade 3 through a community and equity-centered approach across the state. More than ever, we want to ensure every Black, Indigenous and 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 resources that celebrate and affirm their cultural background, race, ability, and experience so that they have opportunity to thrive and live their fullest lives.

The grant program is guided by a Community Solutions Advisory (CSA) Council comprised of 12 community members who bring professional expertise and lived experience in racial equity, early childhood development and advocacy. With membership from around the state, the council has been involved from the beginning of the grant program ensuring that the viewpoints of rural and urban Minnesota, the experiences of tribal nations, as well as new and legacy black, indigenous, and communities of color are foundational to decisions. The council has actively guided the process from RFP creation, reading and scoring applications, and ongoing support and advocacy for more streamlined implementation and processes. The council also shares learnings within and across other state agencies as part of the federal Preschool Development Grant. The collaboration allows for more equitable practices, greater synergy, and deeper learning.

Focusing on the social determinants of health, Community Solutions grantees are demonstrating ways that both community needs and expertise can:

- progress systemic change to address inequities
- amplify the innovative solutions that leverage culturally appropriate community assets
- center the experience and dignity of those most impacted.

The Community Solutions Grant Program represents more than money. It is also recognition that communities of color, American Indian communities, and geographically dispersed communities have invaluable knowledge, and must be active and valued participants within the creation of solutions for their communities.

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 closest 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 grantees as an upstream way to support children and families.

Thank you,



Betty Emajita

Ying Lee

Co-Chairs, Community Solutions for Healthy Child Development Grant Program, Advisory Council