

March 30, 2023

Members of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee In Reference to SF2995, Comprehensive and Collaborative Resource and Referral System for Children (Help Me Connect) - Article 4 Section 55

I am pleased to write this letter to express our strong support for funding to support Help Me Connect, Minnesota's Comprehensive and Collaborative Referral System for Children (Help Me Connect under Article 4. Section 55 titled Comprehensive and Collaborative Resource and Referral System for Children).

Since December 2021, the Northland Foundation has been administering the Minnesota Department of Human Services Community Resource Hub grant. This funding has made it possible to establish seven Hubs in Northeastern Minnesota aimed at helping pregnant and parenting families furthest from social and economic opportunity connect with local resources that can help them thrive. Help Me Connect is an effective and efficient web-based resource tool that is helping the Hub Family Navigators help the families they serve. Our Family Navigators across the region share on a regular basis on how helpful Help Me Connect is as they work with families with young children in need of connecting with resources and services like child care and early education programs, health insurance, food, basic needs items, housing, mental health services, and transportation.

The State of Minnesota faces significant challenges in implementing a coordinated, equitable, and efficient system of care for children and their families. The array of early childhood programs is complex and fragmented due to differences in who offers programs, how they are funded, and variation in their eligibility requirements. Tribal nations and community-based organizations offer culturally relevant services, but these are often unknown as potential referral resources by external providers. Statewide, providers consistently indicate that services are unavailable, unknown, or hard to access. Currently funded by the federal Preschool Development Grant which ends in December 2023, Help Me Connect has supported over 170,000 unique users since its launch in May 2021. The site provides connections to 12,500 programs across the state and collects analytics about families' unmet needs that may be used to bridge gaps and build supportive services.

Funding to keep Help Me Connect going is desperately needed to help ensure families with young children can access community resources wherever they are living in Minnesota. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely



Zane Bail
Chief Operating Officer