



March 30, 2023

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Committee,

The Voices and Choices for Children Coalition strongly supports Article 13, Section 18 of the Senate Health and Human Services Omnibus Bill SF 2995, Community Solutions for Healthy Child Development Grant Program. This historic program 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.

Currently, twenty-two innovative community-generated solutions are being put to work tackling persistent unequal child outcomes across the state with funding from Community Solutions. The funding in SF 2995 will help us harness additional assets and knowledge within communities. To the extent additional funding is available, it would only increase the program's ability to deliver on its promise of a healthy future for every Minnesota child.

Our coalition focuses on shaping more equitable practices and policies that will support better outcomes for children of color and American Indian children prenatal to 8 years old 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. With this opportunity, we can go beyond imagining the many ideas in the state of Minnesota to approach language immersion, home visiting, and other topics around social determinants of health that potential grantees will be able to put into place.

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. The council has been involved from the beginning of the grant program in the RFP creation, reading and scoring applications, and ongoing support and advocacy for more streamlined implementation and processes. The council's process has influenced other grant programs within the Department of Health to prioritize organizations that have 51% or more of their staff and board be comprised of Black, Indigenous and people of color. It is also poised to submit a set of recommendations to more equitably administer the program to the Commissioner of Health based on learnings from the last three years of the pilot.

We acknowledge that there are many other important provisions for children and families within SF 2995. **The Community Solutions for Healthy Child Development Grant Program is an important step in making Minnesota the best state to raise a child.**

Thank you,

Dianne Haulcy
Steering Committee Co-Chairs
Voices and Choices for Children Coalition

Rinal Ray