



April 17, 2024

Senator Melissa Wiklund
Chair, Health & Human Services Committee
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 1100

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Health & Human Services Committee,

Thank you for including SF 4992 and SF 5171 in the Health and Human Services omnibus bill!

These planning grants will allow the Birth Justice Collaborative to continue engaging the community to address disparities in Minnesota's maternal health outcomes and improve access and utilization to evidence-based and culturally appropriate perinatal health care and services. This will save the state money in health care costs and improve the utilization of already existing programs and services.

The Birth Justice Collaborative is a coalition of African American and American Indian led organizations who are partnering with Hennepin County to engage the community in creating and identifying strategies to improve birth outcomes for our communities. By centering families, our culture, evidence driven strategies, and the health and healing of our community, we believe that an American Indian birth center and an African American Homeplace will interrupt racial disparities at the point of care.

1. Planning Grant for an American Indian Birth Center, SF 4992

It is critically important to provide Native women and birthing people a place to seek prenatal care and give birth to their babies in a culturally affirming setting with providers who are leading with these practices. Too many birthing stories in the American Indian community ends in tragedy, 8% of pregnancy associated deaths are of American Indian birthing people, despite representing only 2% of the population.

Having access to culturally congruent and responsive healthcare has been shown to improve health outcomes and overall experience of both birthing people and their babies. An American Indian focused birth center will help mitigate generational harms that have been done against Indigenous women and families and provide a space for Indigenous communities to heal.

2. Planning Grant for an African American Homeplace, SF 5171

The African American Homeplace reimagines how families access support during pregnancy and postpartum period by acting as a single-entry point for pregnant people and their families to learn about and access care, services, and community healing. Although only 13% of the birthing population are African Americans, they make up over 23% of pregnancy related deaths.

The African American-focused Homeplace is an effective strategy to address these racial disparities in Minnesota because it is a safe, cultural healing space for families to learn about and access evidence-based services to support their pregnancy and children, including community-based birth workers, mental health services, cultural parenting groups and community education classes.

Thank you for your time and for supporting birth justice this legislative session. Please reach out to Corenia Smith (corenia@collectiveactionlab.com) with any questions you may have about the Birth Justice Collaborative or the birth justice bills.

Thank you,

The Birth Justice Collaborative

Cultural Wellness Center,

Division of Indian Work,

Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center,

Native American Community Clinic,

Liberty Northside Healing Space,

University of Minnesota Robert J. Jones Urban Research and Outreach Engagement Center