



SOUTHERN MINNESOTA  
INITIATIVE FOUNDATION

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February 16, 2024

Re: Matt Varilek letter of support

I write in support of Matt Varilek for the post of Commissioner of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). I have worked with Matt for the past several years as he led The Initiative in central Minnesota. The Initiative is one of six rural economic and community development foundations – collectively called the Minnesota Initiative Foundations - serving the eighty non-metro counties in Minnesota. The six Initiative Foundations engage in a variety of programs to advance the vitality of their respective regions. Programmatic activities include small business lending and early childhood support and other projects that respond to regional needs.

The presidents of the six Initiative Foundations meet regularly to coordinate and collaborate. Matt has been the facilitator for these meetings and has excelled in that role. These meetings were greatly beneficial as we worked with DEED to deliver Small Business Recovery Grants to businesses experiencing financial hardship due to the restrictions and closures imposed during the Covid crisis.

Matt's understanding of economic development grew out of his previous tenure with the Small Business Administration – an agency with which each of the Initiative Foundations has a close working relationship.

Matt is knowledgeable of employment matters, entrepreneurship and economic development strategies. He is articulate and will be a strong voice in advancing our state's economic development goals. He is an effective leader with a collaborative approach to getting things done. I know he will be an outstanding Commissioner – and strongly encourage the legislature to approve his nomination.

Sincerely,

Tim Penny, President & CEO  
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Collaborating for Regional Vitality

