



March 14, 2022

Representative Tina Liebling

Chair, Health Finance and Policy Committee

Rep. Liebling and Members of Health Finance and Policy Committee:

We are writing in strong support of HF 4099. I am the Family Services Lead at the Northwest Indian Community Development Center and we are recipients of the Community Solutions Grant Program.

Our partnership and support through the Community Solutions Grant program has enabled our organization to improve child development outcomes and reduce health and racial disparities for American Indian families in Bemidji and the surrounding areas by adopting a holistic, multi-generational Anishinaabe Care Coordination model that aims to address the many intersecting health determinants for parenting and expecting Anishinaabe youth and young adults. In a short timeframe, we've been able to

- Established a Grandparents council led by local elders and knowledge keepers that engage with young families through storytelling, teachings, and guidance on intense matters, cultural identity, and family development.
- Our community members have noted an increase in their connection to needs through community support and education to increase child safety, permanency and well-being.
- Our community members have reported an increased access to relevant, cultural specific services to support family needs. This includes the creation of a youth drum night for kids in our community, where boys are welcome to join the drum and the adult lead provides teachings about the drum. Then they learn the basics of drumming and some songs. We hope to build their confidence so that they will sing a lead.

We support HF 4099 because we believe it is a strategy that addresses inequality as well as amplifies the innovative solutions that leverage community assets, are culturally relevant, and center the experiences and dignity of those most impacted by inequity. 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.

We need partners and funds that continue to support choice and access to culturally centered Anishinaabe services where community members have the power to honor, heal, and transform themselves, their children, their families, and their communities. Continued, expanded funding for the Community Solutions Program is investing solutions that recognize the strength of our community in disrupting out of home placements and family separation that is guided by our elders and knowledge keepers.

Martin Jennings  
Executive Director