

March 28, 2023

Dear Representative Liebling,

I write this letter to strongly urge you to include **Help Me Connect, Minnesota's Comprehensive and Collaborative Referral System for Children**, within the House's Minnesota Department of Health House Bill (DE Amendment 2930). We strongly support funding for Help Me Connect, an online system that serves a crucial, basic function to easily connect families with young children to necessary services throughout Minnesota.

The Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board has been using Help Me Connect in our work with families and caregivers. Help Me Connect is an effective and efficient web-based resource tool that is helping navigators within our agency support the needs families in our community. Our navigators use Help Me Connect as they work to connect families with young children to resources and services, such as early education programs, food, basic needs items, housing, mental health services, and transportation. We also actively share Help Me Connect with families as a trusted resource to learn about the variety of programs they may be interested in accessing. Without funding to continue this service, our navigators and families face additional, unnecessary barriers in identifying and connecting to necessary services.

Help Me Connect helps Minnesotans navigate what is a complex system that is also rich with resources – when families and the people who serve them can readily access them. 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.

Current funding for Help Me Connect, through the Preschool Development Grant, ends in December 2023. Since May 2021, Help Me Connect has supported over 170,000 unique users, connecting these individuals to necessary services. The site provides connections to 12,500 programs across the state and collects analytics about families' unmet needs that can be used to fill gaps, build supportive services, and do so in an easily accessible format. Without House support, this crucial service navigator disappears and further complicates the landscape for service connections.

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. We strongly urge you to put Help Me Connect back in the House's Health Budget Bill.

Thank you for your consideration!

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