



March 13, 2022

RE: Support for HF 4099 (Moran) Community solutions for health child development grant program

Chair Liebling and Members of the House Health Finance and Policy Committee:

As a co-chair of the Voices and Choices Coalition, CEO Director at People Serving People, and a parent, I write today in all of these capacities to support for HF 4099 to build on the success of the Community Solutions Grant Program. **This historic program focuses on improving measures of well-being for children of color and American Indian children in Minnesota prenatal to age 8 through a community and equity-centered approach across the state.**

At People Serving People, we are dedicated to preventing childhood, youth and family homelessness. We work with families in the midst of their experience of homelessness and are moving upstream to prevent that experience through both programs and policy. Over 65% of the families in shelter with us identify as African American; 11% identify as American Indian. These two populations are over-represented in those that experience homelessness. We also know that our parents are strong and fierce advocates for their children's health and safety, our kids are smart, fun, brave and resilient, and our families have a vision for their lives.

Across Minnesota, there are persistent health and development gaps for children of color and American Indian children – it is a crisis of both racial and geographic equity, exacerbated by the pandemic. Our communities are underfunded which restricts our ability to self-determine our needs. **Solutions for significant challenges facing children and families should come from the communities closest to those challenges and with the power to leverage local assets for meaningful change.** Communities need access to flexible funding streams to disperse funds of varying sizes that they can use to build on what's working and invest in practice-based evidence.

As a parent of a kindergartner who is a child of color and leader of People Serving People full of children experiencing homelessness, I know that **the collective health and prosperity of our state is ultimately tied to ensuring every child has what they need to thrive.** This bill recognizes that and also recognizes 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 themselves.

Thank you,

Rinal Ray
CEO