

Minnesota State Legislature  
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 15, 2022

Dear Chair Ecklund and Members of the Labor, Industry, and Veterans Affairs Committee,

As the executive director of SOAR Career Solutions (SOAR), a community-based organization located in Duluth, MN, I encourage the MN Legislature to support the MN Department of Labor and Industry's (MN DLI) request of \$1 million for LEAP grant funding.

SOAR has over 39 years of expertise implementing *effective*, evidence-based programming for people who experience social, emotional and/or physical barriers to employment. We serve over 400 participants each year with 17% identifying as Black/African heritage, 4% Multi-racial, 15% American Indian, 5% Hispanic and 47% female – all under-represented populations in the building trades.

Since 2018, SOAR has been a recipient of LEAP funding to help support women, Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) gain the job skills necessary to access apprenticeship opportunities in the building trades. While there is current funding to support LEAP, it covers a portion of the budget necessary to implement these comprehensive trainings. An increase in LEAP funding would help further support job skills trainings and increase representation of women and BIPOC individuals in the trades. When our participants obtain job skills, their self-esteem increases, and they visualize themselves in a career they never felt possible. LEAP is a funding stream that helps make that possible by providing opportunities for under-represented populations to obtain meaningful, high-wage and in-demand employment and become self-sustaining.

Minnesota must invest in what works and increase investments in MN DLI LEAP grant funding.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily K. Edison", written over a horizontal line.

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