

Tish Bolger

House Ed. Finance Committee Testimony HF 1092 3/11/21

- Good morning Mr. Chair and members. My name is Tish Bolger and I am the CEO for Girl Scouts of MN and WI River Valleys. I'm also here on behalf of the CEOs of the other two Minnesota councils—MN and WI Lakes and Pines, and Dakota Horizons.
- Girl Scouts has over 100 years of experience supporting girls in learning and development. Girl Scouts serves over 30,000 girls across Minnesota.
- One Minnesota Girl Scouts initiative that has a proven record of success is the Girl Scouts ConnectZ program. We partner with over 100 schools and community organizations to bring our leadership programming to under resourced girls in the Twin Cities metro area and cities in southern Minnesota like Rochester, Austin, and Worthington.
- Our program is provided at no cost to girls or their families. It is delivered in the schools, community centers, and neighborhoods where girls already are.
- 90% of ConnectZ Girl Scouts receive free or reduced priced lunch. And 90% of the girls we serve identify as girls of color.
- Our program is delivered by our staff, trained youth development professionals, who are predominantly women of color themselves—and understand the needs of the communities we serve.
- Our girl-centered programming allows girls of color from low-income communities to explore a variety of opportunities that otherwise wouldn't be available to them.
- They can grow in areas of STEM, leadership, college and career readiness, social-emotional skills, financial literacy, service learning, and so much more.
- Throughout their ConnectZ experience, girls achieve positive outcomes as they participate in ongoing learning sessions and hands-on learning events such as Girl Scout Camp, career exploration events, and college tours. It is a holistic, culturally-responsive program that adjusts to the needs of the many different communities we serve.
- House File 1092 (**ten ninety-two**) helps prepare girls for success. It would grant Girl Scouts River Valleys funding and would allow us to serve as a fiscal agent, partnering with the Lakes and Pines and the Dakota Horizons Girl Scout Councils, to ensure girls across our state can access Girl Scout programming. This bill includes an ongoing reporting requirement on the use of funds and data tracking related to program outcomes.

- Girl Scouts is a time-tested leadership program. Girl Scouts works and we are available as a resource to girls, their families, school districts, and communities across the state.
- Thank you for your time and consideration. I would like to introduce Jasmine Graves, our ConnectZ Program Director and alum of the program.

Jasmine Graves

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Mr. Chair and members, thank you for having me here today.

- My name is Jasmine Graves. I am a proud alum of the Girl Scouts ConnectZ program and now serve as the Director. I'm here to speak to you about House File 1092 (**ten ninety-two**), a bill that helps bring Girl Scout leadership and life skills programming to girls from underserved and under resourced communities across Minnesota.
- Girl Scouts participating in the ConnectZ program attend weekly sessions and hands-on learning opportunities like college tours, career exploration events, and camp experiences.
- ConnectZ troop leaders are Girl Scouts staff who are representative of the communities served. Our staff partner closely with counselors, social workers, and other school staff to identify girls who lack access to quality programming and need support.
- As a program alum, and now Director of ConnectZ, I have seen the impact this program makes in the lives of girls. It brings different opportunities and resources, like touring historically Black Colleges and Universities, and provides support for girls from a strong mentor who looks like them.
- I built a strong connection with my troop leader and we are still in touch to this day. She held weekly sessions at my high school and even though the troop was voluntary, girls wanted to attend because those meetings provided something that only Girl Scouts provides: a safe, girl only space.
- Being in a girl only space builds confidence and a sense of self that girls can bring with them into mixed gendered spaces. Because of Girl Scouts, the girls in my troop had clear goals for themselves, knew how to work as a team, support their peers, and were ready to lead in their communities.
- After college, when the opportunity arose to work for the Girl Scouts as a ConnectZ staff, I did not hesitate because of how impactful and important the program is to girls it serves.
- A story that has always stood out to me is from a 4th grader from a Rochester Elementary school who had recently joined the program. During the second session, she received her first Girl Scout sash. She walked over to her ConnectZ leader and said, "I've always felt like a no one and that I didn't belong to something. But today I finally belong somewhere, and I am somebody." We know that helping foster a sense of belonging in youth is key to developing self-esteem and confidence.

Thank you for your time and consideration today. We have recorded testimony of May Xiong, one of

our ConnectZ Girl Scouts from Roseville Area High School. This year, she was selected as one of Girl Scouts' first ever Changemaker Award Honorees.

May Xiong

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Mr. Chair and members,

- My name is May Xiong and I am currently a Senior at Roseville Area High School. I have been in Girl Scouts for five years now, but I wish that I could have joined sooner.
- Growing up as a Hmong-American woman, my Hmong culture has very strict ideals with high expectations to follow. I am expected to learn to become a “good” housewife, have good grades, and to not have opinions. Through Girl Scouts, it gave me time to really listen to myself and explore the different possibilities that can lead me somewhere new. It provided resources for me to be able to branch out and without it I wouldn't know where to start. I learned to become a proud Hmong woman and have my own goals.
- I first heard about Girls Scouts through my friends, they encouraged me to join in 8th grade. They told me about how they get to spend time together in an all-girl space with girls who may have similar experiences and struggles to me and that gave me courage to join.
- At my first troop meeting, I had a chance to talk about myself. I noticed that I didn't really understand myself. I found it difficult to find words to describe who I was. This troop meeting felt like an escape from school and whatever was going on in my life. It was a safe and a stress-free environment.
- Through Girl Scouts ConnectZ we learned to build positive relationships with other girls and with the troop leader, Samantha. She would frequently check in on me and it allowed me to recognize that I had not been putting myself first. It felt refreshing to have someone else concerned about my feelings. For me, Girl Scouts became my very own safe haven.
- Looking back at my time in Girl Scouts, it's a place of comfort and fun, it made me more self-aware so that I could have deep meaningful discussions, and most importantly it creates beautiful relationships. Girls Scouts ConnectZ has made me optimistic and always looking forward to the future. It helped me now and I will take what I learned into my future as I am going into nursing school. Lastly, I want to say thank you, thank you for listening to my personal experience in Girls Scouts ConnectZ.



March 11, 2021

Rep. Jim Davnie District 63A
Chair Education Finance Division
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Rep. Julie Sandstede District 06A
Vice Chair Education Finance Division
411 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Support for The Girl Scout Bill HF 1092

Dear Representative Jim Davnie and Representative Julie Sandstede,

On behalf of the girls, volunteers, staff and Board of Directors at Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin Lakes and Pines, I would like to respectfully urge you to support the funding of programs that benefit under-served girls in Minnesota.

The Girl Scout Bill HF 1092 is a nonpartisan initiative to support high-quality culturally responsive GirlScout Leadership Experience programming for girls who wouldn't otherwise have access. Your support of HF 1092 strengthens our Girl Scout mission to build girls of courage, confidence and character who make the world a better place.

Thank you for making Girl Scouts an amazing, powerful and positive experience for girls.

In Girl Scouting,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leigh Ann Davis". The script is fluid and cursive.

Leigh Ann Davis
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Re: Girl Scout Bill (HF 1092)- Letter of Support

Dear Members of the State of Minnesota Education Finance Committee:

Thank you for your review of HF 1092. I support HF 1092 and the value of funding programs which benefit under-served girls.

The GSDH Outreach program serves girls primarily in K-5th grades throughout the council. We aim to bring the Girl Scout Leadership Experience to girls who may otherwise not have the means to participate. Many of our locations are in underserved communities and Native American reservations. At these staff led meetings, we provide girls with skill-building programming centered around STEM, the outdoors, development of life skills, and entrepreneurship that is designed to meet her where she is now and to grow along with her.

The reality is that the population of girls, for whom this leadership experience is essential, is growing. Without the support of grant funding, public and private donations, and our dedicated volunteers, we would not have the resources necessary to provide Girl Scouts to the girls who need us most.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark J. Meyer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



Girl Scouts builds girls of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place.

Girl Scouts Works.

We're the largest nonprofit leadership organization for girls. We exist to build girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place. We prepare more than 30,000 Minnesotan girls for a lifetime of leadership.

HOW?

Through access to hundreds of all-girl, girl-led experiences, skill-building opportunities, and a connection to supportive adults in an inclusive community.



GIRL SCOUTS fuels the female leadership & workforce pipeline in our communities

Today, Minnesota faces a workforce shortage due to an aging population, with significant needs in high skills areas including STEM. Currently, young women make up only 20% of the STEM workforce (ages 23-25).

- The **all-girl environment** in Girl Scouts is proven to move the needle on the STEM gender gap.
- Girls have access to **diverse professional women** who they can look up to and see themselves in.
- We **partner with experts** to provide access to new technology and innovative programming (partners like Society of Women Engineers & Dunwoody College of Technology).
- From engineering to cybersecurity, Girl Scouts provides **STEM programs for every age and skill level**.

Tech leaders think **Girl Scouts' STEM programs have the most potential in the world** for closing the upcoming computer science workforce gap.²



We believe Girl Scouts should be available to every girl.

Girl Scouts ConnectZ and similar outreach programs throughout Minnesota bring Girl Scouts to underserved and under-resourced girls. Youth development experts serve as troop leaders and help lead and guide weekly sessions and field trips (free of cost). Girl Scouts builds knowledge and skills for success in school, work, and life—an opportunity they may not otherwise have.

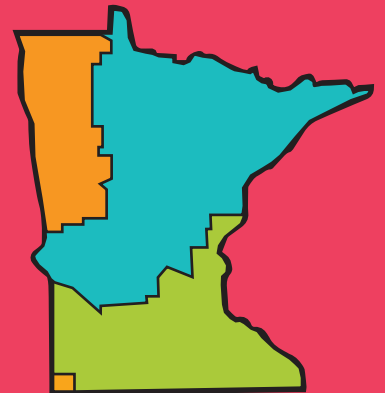


STATEWIDE COLLABORATION WITH

Sister Councils

COUNCIL:

-  Girl Scouts Dakota Horizons
-  Girl Scouts Lakes and Pines
-  Girl Scouts River Valleys (Girl Scouts ConnectZ)



WE ARE COMMITTED TO bringing Girl Scouts to as many girls as possible; helping to close the achievement gap for Minnesota girls.

& that's why we have a bill in the MN LEGISLATURE.

**MINNESOTA
ACHIEVEMENT GAP**



¹ Women's Foundation of Minnesota; Impacts of the Young Women's Initiative of Minnesota on the State's Labor Market

² PRNewsWire.com



THE Girl Scout Bill

The Girl Scout Bill seeks funding to ensure more underserved and under-resourced Minnesota girls have **access to Girl Scouts** through ConnectZ and similar programming.

HF 1092
SF

The bill appropriates \$1.5 million annually from the General Fund to the Department of Education for a grant to support Girl Scout outreach programming **throughout the state**.

WHY NOW?

- Minnesota has one of the **worst racial disparities** in academic performance in the United States.
- Minnesota has a critical need to **grow the workforce pipeline** of young and skilled Minnesotans.

WHY GIRL SCOUTS?

- The Girl Scouts' unique curriculum and program design works to **close the achievement gap** and ensures more girls graduate and attend post-secondary education.

Spotlight on

SAINT PAUL PUBLIC SCHOOLS*



7 IN 10

OF CONNECTZ
GIRLS

utilize the program exclusively
(no participation in other outreach or college access programs).

91%

of ConnectZ girls graduated on time.

93%

of ConnectZ girls are girls of color.

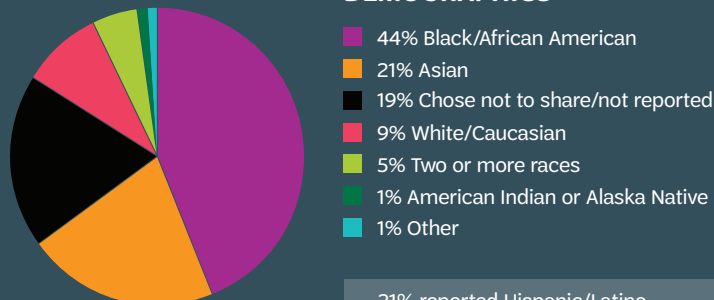
* Data available for the Saint Paul Public School district thanks to our partnership with Sprockets.

GIRL SCOUTS ConnectZ



Girl Scouts ConnectZ gives more girls the opportunity to participate by bringing programming to girls during/after school, within their neighborhoods, and in partnership with other youth organizations. This helps eliminate cultural barriers as well as barriers like cost and transportation.

DEMOGRAPHICS



21% reported Hispanic/Latino
79 % reported Not Hispanic/Latino



2 IN 3

girl participants will be first generation college students.

74%

of high school seniors who participated in ConnectZ planned to attend college.

73%

of girls say they are more confident in school because of Girl Scouts.

90%

of girls participating in ConnectZ qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch.

"I am proud of myself for being able to express my feelings, be a better friend, take responsibility for my actions, and getting into leadership, as I grow older."

—ConnectZ Girl Scout

"Please continue to fund this **essential program needed to support students** where the regular school day program is not able to meet the needs of students."

—ConnectZ School Partner

QUESTIONS?

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