

**May 3, 2021**

**Dear Chairs Pratt and Noor, and Members of the Jobs/Labor Omnibus Bill Conference Committee:**

**As the Conference Committee enters its deliberations, we want to call out the importance of supporting fathers in the lives of their children. The FATHER Project helps low-income fathers secure jobs, train for advancement, and move into careers as they become positive, productive workers and nurturing parents. We also provide guidance for dads who are managing legal and criminal justice obligations.**

**As partners across the state, we have helped to create successful programming available to fathers throughout Minnesota, not just in the metro but also in St. Cloud, Park Rapids, Rochester and surrounding communities.**

**The past year has been challenging. In addition to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were also greatly impacted by the unrest of last summer. Unfortunately, our program space in South Minneapolis was destroyed during the unrest – leaving our space uninhabitable. However, the men in our community need services now more than ever and will need us in the years to come.**

**We thank you for including funding for the FATHER Project in the Senate Omnibus Jobs Bill. As the committee finalizes the conference report, we ask that you include \$1 million for fatherhood programming so that we can better meet the needs of dads across the state. Further, we ask that you provide a direct appropriation for the program. We understand the state's desire to focus on competitive grants but note that unique programs like the FATHER Project do not always fit neatly into a general workforce development and training bucket. A direct appropriation will ensure that dads can continue to receive the support they need to provide the necessary financial and emotional stability for their children.**

**This is a crucial time for families and workforce development needs are great. Minnesota has risen to many challenges to mobilize resources for families overcoming emergency financial strains as a result of the pandemic. However, we know that this pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on low-income workers, particularly workers of color – only increasing our state's longstanding employment disparities.**

**Now is the time for Minnesota to provide dedicated support to fathers, particularly low-income, non-custodial fathers served at the FATHER Project, many of whom are men of color. These men continue to face systematic barriers to their ability to support their children.**

The FATHER Project can be part of the solution, but only with the critical resources needed to serve. We have been overwhelmed with calls and intakes during the pandemic. We are doing what we can, but with waning resources, we have needed to implement a waiting list.

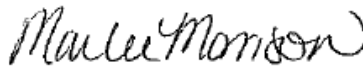
We appreciate the bipartisan support of our program from across the political spectrum in both the House and Senate. We all know how important dads are in the lives of their children. Now is the time to support them and their families as we work toward economic recovery.

We urge you to take the Senate position in including the Father Project in the final conference committee report. It is a critically important time to support dads and their children as we move Minnesota families forward toward economic recovery.

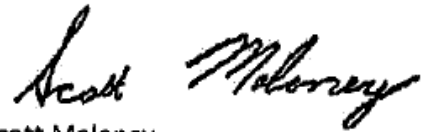
Sincerely,



Michael Wirth-Davis, D.P.A.  
President and CEO  
Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota



Marlee Morrison  
Community Health Director  
CHI St. Joseph's Health



Scott Maloney  
Executive Director  
Family Service Rochester