

Economic and Employment Supports Division (EAESD)

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To: MAWB Operations Committee

From: Pamela McCauley, Minnesota Family Improvement Program (MFIP) Manager

Subject: Strengthening MN Families

From Programs to Ecosystems: Strengthening MN Families

Minnesota families experience life as a whole, not in fragments. Their needs—housing, childcare, mental health, income stability—are interconnected, but our systems respond in parts. This fragmentation disproportionately impacts communities of color and Indigenous families, reinforcing structural inequities.

The Economic Assistance and Employment Support Division, led by the Minnesota Family Improvement Program (MFIP), aims to transform this reality. Rather than launching another one-size-fits-all program, we're rethinking our role as public leaders—not just as service providers, but as **ecosystem shapers** who create conditions for alignment and collaboration.

The Problem We Are Addressing

Despite good intentions, **Minnesota's current system for supporting families is fragmented and misaligned with the lived realities of those it seeks to serve.**

Minnesota's family support systems are structurally siloed and often transactional, failing to reflect how families actually experience life—interconnected across housing, childcare, health, and economic wellbeing. This misalignment leads to missed opportunities for trust-building, culturally responsive service delivery, and early, preventative support. The result is a fragmented system that disproportionately burdens communities of color and Indigenous families, who face compounded barriers when navigating services. While families experience life as a whole, our systems continue to respond in parts—undermining wellbeing, equity, and long-term stability.

This disconnect means:

1. **The current system struggles to respond holistically** to families' strengths, needs, and goals, instead addressing issues in isolation.
2. **Transactional, non-relational approaches dominate**, missing opportunities to build trust, affirm caregivers' lived experiences, and adapt to cultural and contextual nuance.
3. **Preventative and foundational supports** that could stabilize families early are often inaccessible, underfunded, or not designed with whole-family wellbeing in mind.
4. **Communities most impacted by systemic inequities are least well served**, reinforcing disparities rather than correcting them.

5. **Innovative, relational, and equity-centered solutions remain underutilized**, as existing structures favor compliance and maintenance over transformation.

To truly support all Minnesota families in thriving, **we must bridge the gap between how families experience life and how systems are designed to serve them**—advancing a whole-family, equity-driven approach that removes barriers and fosters generational wellbeing.

Guiding Question

Every action in this work will be evaluated by asking: "Does this strengthen Minnesota families?"

When we align how we lead with how families live, we don't just change systems—we transform the ecosystem and strengthen Minnesota families.

Our Approach: Coordinating the Ecosystem

To bridge this gap between family needs and system responses, we've developed an iterative approach that builds knowledge, capacity, and solutions through structured learning cycles that begin at the local level, and ripple outward to a regional level as years progress. We're shaping the conditions for innovation through:

- Statewide training on the Whole Family Approach using EAESD Innovation Funds
- Teaching and encouraging trust-based relationships over transactional compliance
- Shared learning cycles across regions that evolve based on real-world feedback
- Family-defined success and culturally responsive care

This is how ecosystems are coordinated—not through control, but through **alignment of purpose and interdependent action**.

Connecting Our Approach to the Problem

We recognize that bright spots—relational, place-based innovations already working in pockets across the state—can illuminate the path for systemic transformation. By elevating these local innovations and the wisdom of frontline workers, we create a system that is:

- **Family-defined**
- **Equity-centered**
- **Designed to learn**

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Conclusion

Strengthening MN Families represents a strategic pivot from isolated programs to a comprehensive framework that truly addresses how families experience their lives. By aligning our systems with family realities, we can create sustainable, equitable, and effective supports that strengthens Minnesota families for generations to come.