

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-1501**

April 26, 2021

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Agriculture,  
Rural Development, Food  
and Drug Administration  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Agriculture,  
Rural Development, Food  
and Drug Administration  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Fortenberry:

As you craft the fiscal year 2022 Agriculture, Rural Development, and FDA, & Related Agencies Appropriations bill, I respectfully request that you include \$200,000 in community project funding for the Sunflower Child Development and Discovery Center.

The Sunflower Child Development Center is fundamental to the success of the economy in the four-county rural area it serves in Northeast Iowa. Sunflower is a non-profit childcare facility that causes significant positive outcomes for the local economy, early education opportunities, workforce development in the region, and overall community wellbeing. Located in the middle of a rural childcare desert, Sunflower serves as a refuge to families in the area within and surrounding Winneshiek County, where both parents work in 91 percent of families with children aged 0-12 years old. Over the last five years, Iowa has seen a 40 percent decrease in childcare facilities overall. Additionally, the greater Decorah, IA, area where Sunflower is located does not have a single indoor recreation facility for children.

Major employers in the greater Decorah area, including as Collins Aerospace, Winneshiek Medical Center, Stanley Engineering Fastening, and more have expressed steadfast support for this project given their dependence on the availability of childcare to be able to recruit and retain employees. Sunflower's outdated facility has hit its maximum of 120 children in care and has a waiting list of more than 130 children. Several businesses and health care providers identified over 65 jobs that they would be able to fill if they were able to offer a local childcare option to potential employees. Funding for this project would enable the construction of a brand-new facility with over double its present capacity for childcare, a public educational STEM-focused space, and an indoor play space available for community use. This investment will greatly benefit the community with its sustainability components. If awarded, these funds will help support the expansion of new facilities within Sunflower, catalyze growth in this stagnant rural area and its major local employers, and create a replicable model for rural childcare.

This specific location in Decorah, IA, was selected for this project because of its low-income status, economic distress, and long-term population decline due to the inability to recruit workers aged 20-45 years. After over forty years of decline, an investment in a younger workforce is vital for the growth and stability of rural developing communities, and Sunflower would have a wide-scale impact on four of the most rural counties in the First District of Iowa. I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



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Ashley Hinson

Member of Congress

Committee on Appropriations