January 8, 2020

National Association of State Workforce Agencies
444 North Capitol Street, NW Suite 300
Washington, DC 20001

To Whom It May Concern:

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) is submitting a nomination to the National Association of State Workforce Agencies for the 2020 William J. Harris Equal Opportunity Award. Minnesota is nominating its federally-funded, Round Seven Youth Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grant – Partners for Youth Career Pathways. Minnesota’s DEI grant strives to improve employment outcomes for youth with disabilities ages 14-24 years with visible and non-visible disabilities by increasing their participation in career pathways programs. The project also places a special emphasis on serving youth of color who have a disability. The project also enhances the State’s public workforce capacity to serve youth with disabilities using a job-driven approach and provides local and regional employers with qualified emerging workers.

DEED is partnering with three rural Local Workforce Development Areas (WDAs) and the PACER Center to complete project activities and solidify alignment with youth training programs and existing adult career pathways in Minnesota. Through this unique federal grant opportunity, Minnesota has directly addressed education and employment disparities for youth of color and youth with disabilities. Minnesota’s DEI grant met or exceeded all expectations described in the U.S. DOL approved work plan. This includes serving over 430 youth of which nearly 25% are youth of color with disabilities. Given the high youth unemployment rates and low youth labor force participation rates, the DEI project has provided youth with the necessary support and skills to persist through educational and employment barriers they encounter.

Regards,

Hamse Warfa
Deputy Commissioner of Workforce Development