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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

CHAIRMAN, CONGRESSIONAL EXECUTIVE
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COMMITTEE

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March 31, 2023

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
H-307, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
2358-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
H-307, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mike Quigley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member Quigley,

I am writing to request your consideration to fund the **“Community Connections”**, a **division of the Special Children’s Center**, located at 1400 Prospect Street, Lakewood, New Jersey 08701. The Special Children’s Center and their “Community Connections” project, which will be sited on a preserved land at 729 Lakewood Farmingdale Road, Howell Township, NJ 07731, are both in my congressional district.

The Community Connections project will create an accessible community garden for residents within the greater Monmouth and Ocean County areas. Open to the entire public, this community space would be fully adapted for individuals with special needs and disabilities, offering them access to fast diminishing open space suited for agricultural, recreation, and educational opportunities for the special needs community.

The Community Connections project is an appropriate use of taxpayer funds because it fulfills the goals of the Community Development Block Grant program through meeting a compelling local need providing for the acquisition of a multipurpose, ADA accessible, community space. This community garden would also create a safe and supportive environment that allows individuals—especially children with special needs—to foster and develop skills, build social connections, and improve over-all well-being. This program has a federal nexus because the funding provided is for purposes authorized by 42 U.S.C. Section 5305(a)(1).

The Special Children's School is requesting \$250,000 in federal funding so they may construct a wheel-chair accessible greenhouse and purchase the other essential and necessary equipment to accomplish this project.

The benefits of community gardens for people with disabilities go beyond providing sustainable, fresh produce. With regard to children with special needs, a child's physical development and dexterity—especially for those who may not be able to participate in other forms of exercise—can be enhanced through the use of muscles activated with specialized tools and accommodations. Cognitive development, as well as social interaction, can also be fostered through participation in community gardening.

Many recreational and agricultural settings are not conducive to those with physical and developmental disabilities as they tend to be poorly paved and contain attractions at ground level or not within reach for those with physical disabilities. The Community Connections greenhouse will be constructed with the priority towards accessibility, ensuring accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Some of these accommodations will include, but are not limited to, raised ADA compliant garden beds, paved paths for safe navigation, and adapted tools. Designated accommodations for those with sensory and communication needs will be incorporated as well.

Open to all residents of Ocean and Monmouth Counties, the Community Connections Garden will make it easy for those who are sometimes isolated due to structural and societal barriers to participate with their neighbors, working together for a positive, common interest—a key factor in community development. This project also supports environmental policies favoring preservation of farmland through providing opportunities for agricultural vocational training for young adults with developmental disabilities.

I certify that that I have no financial interest in this project, and neither does anyone in my immediate family.

Thank you for your consideration of this important project.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress