



Department of Public Health and Human Services

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Steve Bullock, Governor

Sheila Hogan, Director

August 5, 2019

100 and Change Grant Proposal Review Committee
MacArthur Foundation
Re: Montana State University Grant Proposal
Bozeman, MT 59715

Dear Members of the Selection Committee:

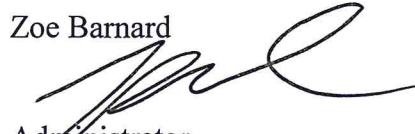
Montana leads the United States in deaths of despair – with a growing population at risk for suicide, depression, substance abuse, and poverty. Our priority population is those at greatest risk for suicide and despair in our rural, Veteran and Tribal communities. Montana’s rural communities (49 of the 56 counties) are struggling to stay viable while our more urban centers are working to inch up gains with recent economic and wage growth largely isolated to our more urban areas. Our rural communities struggle with out-migration and those that return often encounter entrenched mindsets that resist change. Montana has one of the highest per capita Veteran populations in the U.S.; about 1 in 10 residents (9.4%) are Veterans and 80% of them have seen combat. Inequity toward gender and minority communities is large. The American Indian population dies more than 20 years earlier than non-Indian counterparts. Death rates for specific illnesses, including heart disease, cancer, respiratory illnesses, injuries, and suicide are substantially higher in our Tribal and remote rural communities. Deaths of despair are highest in our Tribal and Veteran communities. Suicide rate among Veterans and the youth in Montana is triple the national rate and a majority of suicides were by firearms in 2017.

We support the proposal for advancing Project Montana from Montana State University and their goals to provide hope and opportunity through immersive experiences in art, music, and the humanities. We find that providing access to expressive arts empowers individuals to embrace a sense of community that benefits them in a time of crisis. We will support Project Montana in their efforts to design and build critical access to the arts and the humanities to bridge cultural, generational, geographical, economic, health and political divides and increase resilience in our rural, Tribal and underserved communities. By working through Project Montana’s network of arts organizations, museums, libraries, educational and cultural institutions, and community organizations, we are able to join forces and train more Montanan’s in the essentials of suicide prevention and awareness. This work will expand critical access and help to integrate information on behavioral health concerns and the available resources that are key to advancing goals of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan. Additionally, although the problem is large, success is measurable, and we work to positively impact every Montanan. We will work with Project Montana to establish metrics that demonstrate we are increasing in the number of organizations providing local training and to track the increase in help seeking behavior and use of services to support mental health and well-being. Suicide prevention sets a relatively clear bar for what the communities need to achieve by working to demonstrate they are educating more members of their community on suicide awareness and prevention through our programs as well as reaching more as well as a more diverse group of citizens. We will work together to establish metrics for Project Montana that align with state-designed training goals. Additionally, working through Project Montana and Montana State University’s Extension Service we can better reach a more diverse group of Montanan’s in every county. Working together we will provide more

Montanan's with the essentials of suicide awareness and prevention and enhance suicide awareness and prevention training capacity statewide.

Thank you for your consideration.

Zoe Barnard

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zoe Barnard', written over the printed name.

Administrator
Addiction and Mental Disorders Division