

Testimony
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“Kick Starting Entrepreneurship and Main Street Economic Recovery” Committee on Small Business
United States House of Representatives

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Chairwoman Finkenauer, Ranking Member Joyce, and distinguished members of this committee, thank you so much for inviting me to testify today to provide you with information regarding my experience with childcare during COVID-19 for essential personnel and the general public.

My name is Chad Nath the Executive Director of LINK Inc. LINK’s Mission is to Lead, Inspire, Nurture and Keep children active, educated, enriched and engaged. LINK Grinnell is a 501 (c) (3) organization that will work to address families' needs around childcare and children's needs for additional educational and extracurricular options, with the initial development of an after-school program. LINK collaborates with many local businesses and organizations to ensure a committed and focused workforce. During COVID-19 shutdown in March 2020, LINK pivoted from an afterschool program to provide care for essential personnel’s children so they could continue to provide their life saving work. LINK administered a survey to the essential organizations to identify the community need regarding childcare. The survey was completed by 98 individuals that included 163 children. The need was identified at 53% or 86 children would need emergency childcare if community spread created a surge on Grinnell’s healthcare organizations. LINK completed 7 memorandums of agreement with 7 different facilities space throughout the community to ensure access to all. LINK created isolated pods to protect our assets and resources. The isolated pods have their own staff, restrooms, classrooms, and entrance and exit. Link provided an individual to provide each isolated pod with logistics to provide snacks, crafts, supplies, and frequent disinfecting of the used spaces. This service was provided at no cost to the essential workers from March 23 to June 1, 2020 and there were 37 children who participated in this service.

LINK on June 1, 2020 pivoted to a summer program where there was a fee assessed per attendance. The summer program included many of the children that participated in the essential childcare service. LINK does provide a sliding scale and fee forgiveness for those that may be in financial stress. The summer program formed 6 isolated pod that included 78 children with varied schedules. The isolated pods do not exceed more than 10 individuals to allow for social distancing and low risk of transmission of illness. This is a 10 week program that include enrichments such as art, music, literacy, field trips, and theme weeks to help limit summer/COVID-19 loss of learned skills from the regular school year.

LINK’s response to COVID-19 has increased staffing costs by 158% for essential personnel and 186% for summer programming. LINK’s materials and supply needs have increased by 3 times due to cleaning supplies and PPE “Personal Protection Equipment”. LINK’s revenues have decreased substantially with \$0.00 for essential workers childcare and a projected \$20,000.00 for the summer program compared to \$68,000 for previous summer program a decrease of nearly \$50,000. LINK’s bottom line since March 2020 is revenue from fees at \$22,000 and expenses just from staffing at \$78,000. LINK received \$17,500 from PPP, which helps diminish losses. However, LINK still relies on the support from the very businesses whose employees need LINK to provide childcare in order to work.

LINK has looked for creative ways to seek financial assistance. LINK applied for PPP and 100% of those dollars went to compensating staff for working during essential personnel childcare and was completely exhausted in three payrolls. The PPP would be nice to reopen now that organizations can better predict duration and realized costs. Link also applied for a Community Development Block Grant and was awarded \$20,000 to reimburse additional program expenses. Link has also applied for grants, stipends, donations, and service agreements with local employers. LINK continues to think outside of the box to look for ways to provide care / assistance where needed throughout the greater Grinnell community.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a longstanding fear that childcare is one of our most critical institutions. Throughout this pandemic, LINK has been able to provide childcare to support local business workers; most notably, first responders, healthcare workers, and the foodservice industry. This has been of utmost importance to continue to nurture our health and well being of our community's children.