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Dear Selection Committee,

I'm honored to provide this letter to strongly support **Elena Luna's** application for the **Dr. Mary K. Beyrer Graduate Student Scholarship**. I am familiar with Elena's academic, personal, and community level contributions and accomplishments – and can confidently say she has the intellect, passion, work ethic, maturity, and applied expertise needed to succeed in the field of public health. I first met Elena in 2018 and am familiar with Elena's work with the Austin Parks Foundation, a grant partner of St. David's Foundation (where I served as Senior Capacity Building Officer from 2018-2021). Elena has led the evaluation plan for Austin Parks Foundation, a first of its kind for the organization. The evaluation and implementation plans will impact Austin Parks Foundation for many years to come. In her diverse portfolio, Elena collaborated on a large project funded by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (the Green Schoolyard Project). As a former Program Officer with Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, I can say with confidence that these national grants are extremely competitive and of the highest caliber. Elena was one of a few junior scholars selected to work on such rigorous, community and research-based projects.

Elena's passion for community health improvement, program evaluation, science, and research are insatiable and contagious. Elena was recently selected for the *Graduate Education Diversity Internship (GEDI)*, which is a competitive national program focused on culturally responsive evaluation. She is a voracious reader of the literature and is strongly committed to disseminating work beyond the academy through scientific writing for lay audiences and policy-related efforts. Her commitment to improving the lives of marginalized communities that experience times of vulnerability and inequality is what makes her authentic. Elena has volunteered hundreds of hours, utilizing her public health expertise, while concurrently completing her rigorous doctoral program. It is a true delight to learn alongside Elena – her resilience and adaptability are unmatched, and I am in awe of her technical expertise, capacity to navigate complex datasets that include both qualitative and quantitative data, and management of multifaceted projects. Elena authentically cares about people and communities. As she analyzes and synthesizes data, she never forgets that human beings are at the core of this important work.

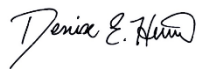
Undoubtedly, Elena has what it takes to continue to grow as a well-respected public and community health practitioner and researcher. Elena has managed heavy academic and professional workloads, while actively volunteering and engaging in her community. Her lived experiences, academic and technical proficiencies, and curiosity are just a few characteristics that enable her to be a model scholar and colleague. Working in health promotion and improvement requires a high tolerance for ambiguity, amiability, and understanding of health inequities and social justice. Elena is committed to moving the dial forward on health inequities that exist among ethnic minority and under resourced communities. Elena's curriculum vitae and application speak for themselves – but it is rare to find someone with

Elena's empirical and technical expertise, who is also bilingual and can translate complex research for lay audiences.

Elena works well with peers, senior and executive level faculty and staff, and junior scholars. Her willingness to ask tough questions is a strength not found in all colleagues. Elena is a natural leader and gifted communicator of science, health and human development, and applied knowledge. She demonstrates empathy and compassion, while also applying rigor and a holistic perspective to her work. Elena works diligently to ensure that the next generation of leaders has access to role models and opportunities to succeed. Elena exudes a mature, articulate, positive, caring, and collaborative character – and is a service oriented scholar. I am most touched by her passion to serve marginalized communities through science and discovery. Her interests lie in better understanding root causes and consequences of racial and economic inequalities, and how we can disrupt the cycles that serve to maintain these inequities.

The caliber of Elena's work ethic, capacity to move complex projects forward, sense of humor, and contagious passion are unparalleled. Elena Luna is an excellent candidate for this scholarship, and she demonstrates a strong commitment to healthy equity and inclusion, a wealth of applied and empirical knowledge, enthusiastic curiosity, and an unbounded spirit. I remain excited about the contributions Elena will continue to make in the professional and personal domains of her life. I provide my strongest recommendation for **Elena Luna's** application. She cares about improving health outcomes for all communities, especially those most impacted by health inequities and social injustices.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Denise E. Herrera".

Denise E. Herrera, PhD MCHES
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