



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release**  
**Contact: Gedlu Metaferia**  
**(314)776-8885\**  
**(314)732-3350**  
**April 8, 2010**

**Missouri Foundation for Health denied AMAAM**  
**for Basic Support (“Health Giveaway Money”) without understanding Funeral expense**

*(\*This PR is inevitably longer so that we want the reader to capture and understand the whole issue. Gedlu B. Metaferia takes full responsibility standing firm on the side of justice, thereby accepting any retribution. I also expect the same retribution by some of the MFH partners for understandable reasons)..*

Missouri Foundation for Health was established as a result of Missouri State Litigation against Blue Cross Blue Shield regarding investments classified as “non-profit funds” in the 1990s. I and my agency were enthusiastic supporters of the law suit and settlement. The fund was rightly put in to a foundation for helping the uninsured and the underinsured and also filling the service gaps with complete bylaws and regulations. However, there was no mechanism for oversight by an outside body regarding this enormous amount of money which had been technically received by efforts of public officials and public funds, or there is no a procedure of legitimate grievance on grant discrimination, regional health outcomes and provisions that are related to civil rights. It is because of lack of such oversight mechanisms and complaint procedure that I decided to write this press release as the Executive Director of AMAAM.

In my agency’s opinion there are programs the MFH does very well and areas which it lags behind. My agency had been a beneficiary of HINT grants (Health Interventions IN Non Traditional Setting) of \$50,000 for two years after persistent effort and back and forth exchange and expending enormous amount of energy and justification, though they did not want to fund my agency. Out of the estimated

15,000 African legal immigrants in St. Louis region 99% are uninsured and underinsured. They just pay their sliding scale fee in local clinics and get treatment. I myself stopped Blue cross blue shield coverage after paying nearly \$47,000 for 9 years with high deductible debt and co pay.

AMAAM is a multipurpose agency eligible for both HINT grants, advocacy grants and Basic Support of MFH. About 80% of AMAAM staff time is spent in medical interpretation, transportation to medical centers, workman's comp injury application assistance, interpretation of immunization "date" records (Gregorian vs Julian), assisting in filing medical forms in doctors appointments, in providing health education, regarding exercise, nutrition, mental health, domestic violence always in collaboration with experts and health professionals. We also provide social adjustment services like orientation by group or individuals, referral of traumatized clients, referral of patients with mental issues, home and hospital visits. All of these services are 100% health related for the segment of our population that have come from war zone and had faced trauma and torture. There is only one social adjustment. Whether it is health related or acclimation to society it settles the human mind to the new environment. It encourages normal functioning in a new society. It is a painful transition. It is absolutely health related. No expert with conscience will deny this fact. Social adjustment is inexorably linked to health. If one looks carefully at even at citizenship education regarding family reunion, economic opportunity, "removing the phobia of authority" (fearing those in power rather than being their public servant, civic engagement for balanced living) it intersects with health. Financial literacy is indeed related to health among new comers. I believe this why many foundations including MFH are exploring work force development issues as it relates to health. The experts know better.

The Funeral Issue: 99.99% of African immigrants do not buy funeral insurance. When African Muslims die the Mosque helps them initially, and they contribute the fund and return it. When Christians mainly Ethiopians die they contribute \$10,000-15,000 for individual or family funerals and give to AMAAM, so that Mr. Metaferia arranges the funeral and pays to Kutis and Resurrection Cemetery. Funeral is a soothing and stabilizing final therapy for loved ones. It has a health component in it; no scholar in good conscience shall deny that. We had also two funerals in which the men killed their wives and killed themselves leaving 2 small children in each case. Out of 400-600 church members many had nightmares, it was a community tragedy. The church leadership, especially our Head Priest gave leadership in stabilizing the community. AMAAM referred the most affected one to clinicians for counseling. The total funeral fund contribution which MFH claims is not related to health in the past 2 years is about \$45,000. These are not permanent project money. They are "pass through funds"

AMAAM applied a grant for domestic violence in light of the above documented cases, on one human trafficking case and other spousal abuse cases to curb the rise in the incidence by education. MFH denied our request citing that \$47,000 is a few dollars off from 25% of our total expense, while it had every chance to always give the lowest amount. AMAAM applied for Basic Grant for organizations that spend 60% of their expenses on health related services. Before applying AMAAM requested for eligibility thinking that MFH may miss the general picture of this unique organization. We felt that this agency may see issues in terms of pills and injections and may miss even conversations between two abused women can lift their burden because of their solidarity and sharing. Community socialization and funerals are evidence based therapies for closure. MFH allowed us to participate in submitting the grant. Even they gave me hope. Finally they mentioned most of our expenses (49%) were funeral, financial literacy and citizenship education (12% each). If they have included 12 % of the funeral to health related

we would have won the grant. Anyway I and 2 AMAAM staff work 2 days per week as volunteers free without pay when we are not looking for jobs as unemployed persons. Out of curiosity when I looked at form 990 of MFH, the salary of one CEO will enable me to serve 2,000 immigrants for 4 years. Still I am happy for him. But I want him to understand our case of the uninsured and underinsured. He cannot be questioned and can deny or award grants at will. I used to live in a similar bureaucracy 32 years ago. I question the integrity of MFH on this specific issue of funeral counting and I demand a public apology for my clients. I will also continue to apply for grants and see their response each time. Grant distribution demands fairness, responsibility and highest form of integrity. As a result our expectations were dashed. We were almost shocked beyond belief when we were denied. I knew that I am taking on a powerful well greased foundation in argument and public debate in this long press release. As a human right activist in my past 30 years in my country I do have the experience not to fear them even like a small flea. Defending the rights of myself and the most vulnerable is a sacred duty as long as I submit my petition in the court of public opinion. I have honestly lost respect for the two senior managers. I even asked them to apologize for the African Community because of this issue of funeral, unfortunately of no avail. This is why I suggest there has to be an oversight mechanism in private foundations, government contracts, tax district grants and energy fund distributors. Otherwise the promise of America works only for the powerful and the connected. They become arrogant, out of touch and lose sight of their mission. This is a country of laws and opportunity. Some foundations and non-profits are trading on compassion putting the poor under the maze of endless circular referrals. Our faith leaders have special calling to challenge this sinful maze that directs funds for the comfort of the manipulators in the disguise of helping the less fortunate. Finally I owe it to this country to document and reveal injustices, because it has given me shelter, freedom and to think independently, to make our country a better place to live and to be brave in times of adversity. There is no any better system in the planet that stands for opportunity and freedom. I have also directed our two immigrant faith based institutions to place this document as a historical file that their main agency is denied grants because it organized the community to stabilize families in two tragic cases. It would have deserved congratulations from MFH. MFH would have helped the underinsured and the uninsured by helping to graduate nurse practitioners and physicians assistants to do primary and preventive care in disadvantage areas, at least for 10 of them, the fraction of the money it has spent for universities to study outcomes. MFH has missed a great opportunity of cultural understanding, global training and universal knowledge that our country needs in this time of internet. The rights of many uninsured are at stake in this BASIC SUPPORT. It is a civil rights issue for many. One can think of litigation. Litigation can bring fair, unfair or boarder line decisions. The important thing is to see this document as a historical document for the descendants of our clients and African immigrants and refugees in years to come. We will authenticate it as a document that can pass to generations. You see, they have constituted MFH as a body that can take any decisions for the uninsured and underinsured projects. Of course, there are bad and excellent proposals. But examine our proposal. Should we be denied grants if we encourage and galvanize communities for funerals and solace, which has a mental health stabilization effect. Is there a judge, a jury, a justice entity which can involve without asking enormous amount of money for application fee or formality. Who investigates advanced, subtle and calculated discrimination. As far as my work in the African immigrant and refugee communities to take this stand on their behalf I have already earned the GOLD MEDAL written in the hearts of many. You cannot buy such GOLD MEDAL by money. It is the result of living for the sake of others to make our world a better place to live. I am not advertising to tell about myself for a gain. I want to teach the CEOs of MFH about myself truthfully and out of righteous indignation! I do not need any "license of advocacy". Ask pioneer Ethiopians and other Africans who came to the US in the last 20 years to St. Louis, close to 15,000 immigrants, visitors, pass

through guests, residents and families including secondary migrants. I am capable of understanding whether I am selfish or not. The Creator has given me that gift of discernment. There are many times I have worked 16 hours without meal to solve the problems of the suffering. I am not bragging about it. I am telling the truth to MFH CEOs. I have also taken organizational decisions that next time clients die I will form a special funeral account after consulting with our attorneys.

Related documents are available by appointments.