

Erikson Institute

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement on the death of 8-year-old Melissa Ortega



CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, January 24, 2022- Eight-year-old Melissa Ortega was tragically shot and killed while walking down the street with her mother over the weekend. She was a resident of La Villita and a student at Emiliano Zapata Academy. Once again, we have lost a child who will not have a chance to reach her full potential.

The Erikson community is grieving alongside the community of La Villita, her classmates, and Melissa's family. We believe that children deserve to feel safe and live in communities that support their health and emotional well-being. We must make intentional investments in communities like La Villita and deeply examine the distribution of resources for families so that Brown and Black children have equitable opportunities to reach their full potential.

Gun violence is an important issue that continues to ravage our city, most especially the well-being of young children in our most vulnerable communities. Children exposed to violence may suffer difficulties forming relationships, exhibit regressive behavior, develop anxiety and depression, and display aggression.

Erikson is dedicated to fostering more just futures for young children, families, and communities. As we navigate the aftermath of this tragedy, we are committed to providing positive ways to support children and their parents in healing. The Center for Children and Families (CCF) is available to provide mental health counseling for children birth through age 8, including through our clinic, Centro para Niños y Familias, located in La Villita. The clinic and its team know the significant role of mental health for young children and families. Bilingual therapists are available, and all families are welcome regardless of ability to pay. For more information, please visit <https://www.erikson.edu/center-children-families/>.

Erikson Institute educates, inspires, and promotes leadership to serve the needs of children and families. We have a premier graduate school dedicated to child development. We provide direct services to our community's children and families. We are leaders in influencing early childhood policy. We work tirelessly every day so that all children can achieve optimal educational, social, emotional, and physical well-being. At Erikson Institute, we know that investing in the early years of children will last a lifetime.

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