



*Helping kids succeed in school and life for 50 years!*

**MSSWA**  
MINNESOTA SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION

March 8, 2020

Dear Chairperson Representative Youakim and Members of the Education Policy Committee:

The Minnesota School Social Workers Association (MSSWA) appreciates the ongoing advocacy to strengthen school mental health services. Mental health is an essential component of a child or adolescent's healthy development. A child or adolescent's mental health is critical for the development of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills and social awareness that supports learning and academic success. Failing to meet a students' mental health needs can create significant barriers to academic achievement, social-emotional development, successful transition into adulthood and can even compromise school safety. Thus, MSSWA supports HF3219 and HF3001 as valuable legislative initiatives to enhance school-based mental health supports as well as vital training for all school personnel who work with Minnesota students.

Children's mental health disorders affect many children, adolescents and families necessitating a public health response to ensure early intervention and prevention efforts. **One in five children suffers from serious mental health problems** that are severe enough to impair how they function at home, in school, or in the community. Research from the National Center for Disease Control confirms that **the onset of mental health disorders may occur as early as 3 to 11 years old** (CDC, 2019). Another reason for strengthening mental health service delivery in schools is the increase in suicide rates amongst youth over the past decade. **Suicide is the second leading cause of death for children, adolescents, and young adults ages 5 to 24.** (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2017). Furthermore, **"one out of every 4 children attending school has been exposed to a traumatic event that can affect learning and/or behavior"**. Exposure to traumatic events especially during a child's early years can adversely **affect a child's sense of security, attention span, memory and ability to process information resulting in a lower GPA, inconsistent school attendance, more suspensions/expulsions as well as a decreased ability to read and can lead to poor outcomes later in adulthood** (NCTSN, 2008)

**HF3219** recognizes the need to implement best practices in overseeing a continuum of mental health service delivery within our schools. Best practice to meet mental health needs of students uses a combination and a continuum of school based mental health providers like **school social workers**, school linked mental health providers and in collaboration with culturally responsive community mental health supports and providers. School Social Workers are **trained mental health professionals and practitioners** who not only provide direct services to students and families in the form of individual or group therapeutic support but also serve as a resource to administrators and other educators, providing consultation and training on identifying students with mental health needs and a referral process when services are sought. School Social Workers unique training is grounded in ethical practice that ensures students and

their families are provided services within the context of multicultural understanding and competence.

In addition, the School Social Work Association of America's National Practice Model illustrates how all school social workers are expected to possess advanced knowledge and technical skills in the following 3 areas (SSWAA 2013):

- (1) provision of evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services;
- (2) promote a positive school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence and
- (3) ability to maximize access to school-based and community-based resources

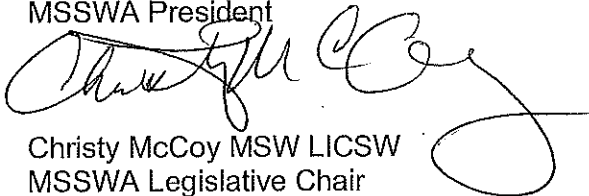
**HF3001** is vital to providing essential education for all school staff to assist with increased awareness and early intervention efforts to support student needs. School Social Workers across Minnesota have been providing training on the Early Warning Signs of Childhood Mental Illness, Trauma and Suicide Prevention. Utilizing a multi-tiered system of support, school social workers collaborate with other school employed mental health providers as well as outside culturally responsive supports to holistically meet the needs of students. Thus, school social workers are the vital link between the school, home and community.

On behalf of MSSWA, we urge you to support HF3001 and HF3219. Thank you again for creating systems and policies to support the social, emotional and physical wellbeing of all students. If you have any questions or would like further information, please feel free to contact Molly Fox MSW LICSW, MSSWA President or Christy McCoy MSW LICSW, MSSWA Legislative Chair.

Sincerely,



Molly Fox MSW LICSW  
MSSWA President



Christy McCoy MSW LICSW  
MSSWA Legislative Chair