

**March 28, 2022**

Dear Chair Schultz and Members of the Human Services Finance and Policy Committee,

**HF3404** seeks to expand intensive family-centered mental health models enough so that even more kids and families can qualify for this important support. My agency is a leading provider of Intensive Treatment for Foster Care (ITFC) one of the models referenced in the bill.

We want to expand ITFC eligibility beyond kids and families in foster care and extend eligibility to children and families at risk for foster care because the parents and foster parents we have served have told us that if they only had ITFC sooner they could have avoided out of home care or the child welfare system all together.

We continue to see that when the right mental health services are offered with the right intensity, families can make big changes and adapt to ensure they stay in-tact as a family. The return on investment for these families has been huge. Early and successful exit from foster care leads to less stress on our foster caregiver community and ensures that kids grow up where they should, with their family. As a system of care and a child welfare system we can't afford deep end and protracted system involvement with these families and kids and families can't afford the ramifications of long-term interventions that intervene too little, too late.

Our agency got into providing ITFC because there was a gap in the mental health care that kids and families were getting in foster care. Relative caregivers and other caregivers alike were wearing down and burning out because mental health care with flexibility and intensity was an afterthought in our system of care. Since we started our program (one of the first and largest in the state), we have been able to work with cases to stop new crises from developing and get kids to successful permanency with their parents and adoptive families by supporting their mental wellness with targeted, intensive and individualized interventions.

We anticipate incredible return on investment if we can connect even sooner with families at risk for out of home placement and foster care. We might be able to circumnavigate the need to disconnect kids and their families altogether. Imagine a world with no need to disconnect parent-child bonds, no need for disconnection from everything kids know and love about their home and family. Help us give every child and family the intensive mental health support they need to stay together with expanded eligibility for intensive mental health services outlined in HF 3404.

Please let me know if I can be of any assistance or provide additional background information as to the importance of this bill.

***Rob Edwards,*** MSW, LGSW, PACC

Chief Executive Officer  
Lee Carlson Center for Mental Health and Well-Being  
7954 University Ave NE  
Fridley, MN 55432  
651-428-3113 direct  
[redwards@leecarlsoncenter.org](mailto:redwards@leecarlsoncenter.org)  
[www.leecarlsoncenter.org](http://www.leecarlsoncenter.org)

*Lee Carlson Center is a non-profit safety-net mental health provider operating in the greater twincities metro areas since 1979.*

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