



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

February 9, 2023

The Honorable Cheryl Youakim
House Education Finance Committee
Room 443, State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Support HF362 – COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES LEAD

Chairperson Youakim and Education Finance Committee Members:

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) writes in strong support of HF362 to establish a lead position within the Department of Education as a source of information and support for schools in addressing students' mental health needs and developing comprehensive school mental health systems. AFSP is the leading national not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide; our Minnesota Chapter carries out this mission across the state through research, education, and advocacy.

While we won't know the large-scale effects of the pandemic on mental health, we do know that in 2021, we lost 110 young people ages 10-24 to suicide in Minnesota, making it the 2nd leading cause of death for that age group. According to the CDC's latest Youth Risk Behavior Survey from 2019, in the year prior, more than 1 in 3 (36.7%) high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row; 18.8% seriously considered attempting suicide; 13.6% reported making a plan about how they would attempt suicide; and 8.9% attempted suicide one or more times. This suggests that we can and must do more to increase awareness of mental health programs and resources that are available for students who may be struggling.

The stigma around mental health often creates an environment that discourages showing signs of vulnerability, which can contribute to a reluctance to seek help or self-disclose mental health concerns or suicidal thoughts. Mental health is central to student success and well-being, and we owe it to our students to ensure they are supported in seeking help and have resources they can turn to when they are struggling. We also owe it to our schools to provide support and assistance for prevention education and loss support after a suicide death and HF362 will do just that.

I encourage you to move this important piece of legislation forward so it can be signed into law. With your support, we can act to affirm the state's commitment to improving the lives of Minnesota's youth and prevent the tragic loss of life to suicide in the future. The AFSP Minnesota Chapter appreciates your consideration, and we look forward to working with you and your staff on these issues moving forward. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda B. Leininger".

Amanda B. Leininger (she/her)
Area Director, Minnesota Chapter
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
T: 507.738.0725 E: aleininger@afsp.org