

May 2, 2023

*Via E-Mail*

Re: Comments and Support for H.F.2847/S.F. 2934

Dear Members of the Human Services Conference Committee,

As the Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, I am submitting this letter to offer our agency's perspective on H.F. 2847/S.F. 2934 and their critically needed investments in Minnesota's disability and mental health services and programs. As I believe you all know, the Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities (OMHDD) is a small, independent state agency with a statutory mission to promote the highest attainable standards of treatment, competence, efficiency, and justice for persons receiving services for mental illness, developmental disabilities, chemical dependency, or emotional disturbance. Our staff advocate for clients' rights, health, and well-being; monitor service delivery systems; and provide recommendations for systemic improvements.

We want to thank you for your support of OMHDD, our work, and our clients throughout this Legislative session. We appreciate both the breadth and depth of your work to improve the support services that our clients receive across the spectrums of care and settings. As you all know, the exploding direct care crisis poses significant challenges for individuals and families who depend on services and supports not just to remain safe and healthy, but to live, work, and enjoy life in their chosen homes and communities. These challenges must be addressed from both fiscal and policy perspectives, by supporting providers of services while still maintaining a focus on ensuring timely and sustainable access to necessary treatment and services, and protecting client rights and informed choice. Collectively, S.F. 2934 and H.F. 2847 do an excellent job of balancing and addressing these overarching needs and goals. As you go through the conference committee process, we do ask that you continue to view your proposed legislation through two primary lenses:

- Does the proposal best address the needs and preferences of the individuals receiving the services and/or living in those care and treatment settings? Does it support informed choice?
- Does the proposal and the omnibus bills overall include, at a minimum, the same or comparable flexibilities (such as shared staffing for IHS services) and funding for in home services (PCA/CFSS, CDCS rate increases) as those being proposed for congregate care and institutional treatment settings?

In addition, and specific to our work at OMHDD, we would like to note that while the Governor's budget and H.F. 2847 include a much needed and appreciated increase to our agency's appropriation, we are seeking a slightly larger amount, reflected in S.F. 2934, necessary to implement OMHDD's strategic plan and to meet our clients' needs for advocacy and

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assistance. The scope of and demand for our work has greatly expanded over time – for example, the implementation of assisted living licensure requirements, including information about and notice to our agency when various client service issues arise - without a corresponding increase in our appropriation and staffing. Similarly, there are several legislative proposals this session that we support that also include participation by OMHDD without any commensurate funding increases.

For your review, I am including two, one-page documents, versions of which some of you have already seen:

1. A background page explaining the need for OMHDD's appropriation request, and
2. A comparison between OMHDD's funding increase in the Governor's budget and our request to fully fund our strategic planning efforts.

We hope that these documents will provide useful context for our agency's work and requested appropriation increase as the conference committee moves forward. Please feel free to contact me or our Deputy Ombudsman, Lisa Harrison-Hadler, should you have any additional questions. Thank you again for your efforts this session to improve Minnesota's disability and mental health programs and services.

Sincerely,



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Enc.

cc: Lisa Harrison-Hadler