



Good morning, Chairman, Rep. Noor and members of the House Human Services Finance Committee.

I am writing to you today to bring attention to a brewing mental health and service access crisis and to ask for your support on HF 1626 (Hassan).

As CEO of one of the largest dedicated nonprofit autism therapy providers in the state, I know firsthand the positive impact that intensive therapy services can have on kids and families dealing with autism. I also know from direct experience the crisis we are facing with **EIDBI (MA funded) rates that have not changed in 10 years**, coupled with the overall workforce challenges and additional challenges caused by the COVID pandemic. MAC and other providers are struggling to stay afloat financially.

- Many providers have reduced/eliminated services, sold buildings or closed and consolidated locations
- Some providers have completely closed and discontinued serving kids through the EIDBI program
- Numerous providers are showing significant (some 7 figures) financial losses

We also have experienced significant workforce challenges that have caused our waiting list for services to **increase from 240 to 501 over the past couple years**.

- MAC's average entry level therapist wages have increased **more than 20% in just five years** and we still struggle to find a sufficient number of therapists – especially in the metro area
- We have been forced to “close” intake and reduce services in the metro area due to lack of staff
- At one point this past summer there were more than 90 advertisements for therapists from more than 30 providers on the Indeed platform in the metro area
- MAC had more than 430 staff prior to the pandemic – today we struggle to maintain 350+ even with significant wage increases
- MAC had to implement “rolling callouts” as a result of the staff shortage and lingering impacts of COVID – resulting in reductions of services for some families of as much of 40% in some cases

The number of kids being served has decreased and the number of families waiting for services has increased dramatically as indicated by the state's own numbers as well as MAC's numbers. These are lost opportunities that we will never get back. Providing the intensive services early – generally between the ages of two and six - produces the best overall outcomes and often leads to a reduction in the need for services in the long term.

The funding for the autism therapy services is an investment in the future of these kids and an investment in the future of our society as more and more kids are diagnosed with autism.

**Please help us continue these critically important services by supporting HF 1626 and other companion efforts such as HF 1604.**

Sincerely,

Jeff Nichols,



CEO, Minnesota Autism Centers