

**Minnesota Department of Human Services
Elmer L. Andersen Building
Commissioner Jodi Harpstead
Post Office Box 64998
St. Paul, Minnesota 55164-0998**

April 27, 2022

Dear Chair Moran and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

I am writing today to share the Minnesota Department of Human Services' feedback on the House's Health and Human Services omnibus budget package (HF 4706/SF 4410). We sincerely appreciated the work of Chairs Liebling, Schultz, and Pinto to craft this budget.

Less than a year ago we all worked together to craft a historic health and human services budget that will have generational impact and it is exciting to see *this* historic budget package. The House budget will help us address the challenges we face today, while investing in the future to ensure we emerge from the COVID pandemic stronger than ever before.

To start, we want to express our sincere appreciation that the House HHS omnibus budget package includes, and in some cases builds on, so many of the Governor's priorities for DHS programs and services.

Most notably:

- Investments to support the caring professions workforce. We appreciate that that the budget expands on the investments in the Governor's package to provide even more support to hard hit areas of our workforce. This focus on workforce includes robust investments in child care, which we know is the "workforce behind the workforce," and the early childhood portion of this budget in particular reflects the same priorities of the Walz-Flanagan administration – that Minnesota should be the best place for all children to grow up.
- Resources to support reprocessing health care eligibility for 1.4 million Minnesotans on our public health programs following the end of the federal public health emergency. This will be crucial to ensuring that people do not see their services interrupted.
- Improvements to make Minnesota's economic assistance programs, MFIP and GA, work better for people who use them. Changes in the way the programs calculate benefits will offer more consistent financial support to people with low incomes, and increasing the GA benefit will offer people in deep poverty more support to meet their basic needs. We also appreciate investments to tackle the growing problem of food insecurity.
- Investments to improve DHS operations, expand compliance activities, meet increased licensing demands and credit providers for background studies as well as funding for IT systems work to transform human service delivery into an integrated, person-centered experience.

- Funding to continue the development of the electronic medical record within our Direct Care and Treatment system. This will improve patient care and outcomes across the entire behavioral health care system operated by DHS.
- A robust package of investments to continue building Minnesota's behavioral health infrastructure to make sure this sector is able to meet the growing needs of Minnesotans coming out of the pandemic, including efforts to tackle the opioid crisis with a focus on addressing the deep disparities among communities who are feeling the most devastating impacts in terms of overdose deaths.
- Investments to expand access to affordable and comprehensive health care through the creation of a MinnesotaCare buy-in, improve health equity by making changes that, as DHS' Dr. Chomilo talks about, build equity into the walls of Minnesota's public health care programs and ensure children do not have their health care interrupted throughout the year.
- Initiatives to support tribal communities to provide culturally relevant health care, behavioral health, child welfare, and food support to people in their communities.
- Efforts to reduce the number of children entering the child welfare system while addressing the significant disparities in that system.

In addition, we are pleased to see shared priorities for investments to address Minnesota's crisis of homelessness. These investments are urgently needed and we appreciate that the House is proposing historic investments to meet this need. We would like to continue discussing some of the DHS proposals that were not included, particularly those that continue initiatives being funded with HCBS FMAP dollars, which will face a funding cliff without on-going resources.

We also appreciate you including other important recommendations from the Governor's budget, including federal compliance and technical changes that support our efforts to improve our processes and avoid errors.

There are also many changes in this bill that provide significant investments to expand access to services and supports. These include expanding access to Medicaid for people with disabilities and older adults by increasing the income standard, expanding dental coverage in our public health care programs, increasing rates for Elderly Waiver services, and increasing the income limit for SNAP food support (to name a few). We greatly appreciate your commitment to ensuring that people across the state have access to the support they need.

Lastly, there are few recommendations from the Governor's budget that are not included in this budget such as expanding the Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota program, which gives people with low incomes matched savings accounts. We'd like to continue discussing these as we move into the next phase of session.

Thank you again for all of your work putting together a budget that will help us transform Minnesota's health and human services system to meet the needs of our state coming out of the COVID pandemic.

Sincerely,



Jodi Harpstead
Commissioner