

May 3, 2023

Chair Fateh, Chair Pelowski, and Members of the Conference Committee,

My name is Jodi Gertken, and I'm the Director of State Government and Community Relations for CentraCare. I'm grateful for the opportunity to express our sincere appreciation for the inclusion of our request for \$20 million dollars for an expansion of a medical school in St. Cloud.

CentraCare and the University of Minnesota Medical School are partnering to develop a medical school campus in St. Cloud to train medical students to serve rural communities across Minnesota. Unfortunately, rural Americans are at greater risk of death from heart disease, cancer, unintentional injury, chronic respiratory disease, and stroke. Likewise, people living in rural areas face longer wait times for medical care, travel farther to access care, and experience poorer health outcomes than their urban counterparts. Compounding this problem is a looming physician shortage that is hitting rural communities hardest. While 20% of the U.S. population lives in rural communities, only 11% of physicians practice in such areas. Additionally, rural physicians are older than metro providers. The median age of a rural doc is 58 and 1/3 of those docs plan to leave practice in 3-5 years.

We are confident the best and most sustainable way to address this physician shortage in rural Minnesota is to train new medical students in the communities in which we want them to serve. The last U of MN medical school expansion was in Duluth, 1972. Since that time, Minnesota's population has grown by approximately 2 million people, yet programs to train physicians have not kept pace. If no action is taken to solve this problem, the health, wellness, and quality of life for people living in rural Minnesota will continue to be negatively affected.

By keeping the proposed \$20 million in the Higher Ed Omnibus Bill, we have an opportunity to address this healthcare crisis with a solution that will impact Minnesotans for generations to come and ensure that access to quality healthcare is not limited by your zip code.

Thank you for the chance to share our gratitude and express our urgency to remedy this crisis.

**Jodi Gertken** | Director of State Government Affairs and Community Relations

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