

April 27, 2023

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

We at CentraCare greatly appreciate that the Senate has included \$20 million dollars for the expansion of a medical school campus in St. Cloud in their Higher Ed Omnibus Bill. Investing in the health of all Minnesotans is vital to our state's ability to thrive. Right now, we have an opportunity to address a myriad of healthcare challenges facing rural Minnesotans.

Our rural communities are demographically older, poorer, and sicker than their metropolitan and suburban neighbors. While 20% of the U.S. population lives in rural communities, only 11% of physicians practice in such areas. In Minnesota, 1 in 3 rural physicians plan to leave their profession in the next five years. Our rural communities are already feeling the impact of this very real challenge, and it will exponentially get worse if we don't act now.

This proposal creates opportunities to train physicians in Central Minnesota who are prepared to practice medicine in rural communities across the state. Therefore, we appreciate the inclusion of this one-time, \$20 million request in your bill to support the development of this program and ask for your support and advocacy during committee. Once launched, CentraCare will take full responsibility for ongoing costs year over year through significant investments – both through operational and philanthropic funding – because the need in our rural communities is urgent.

As higher education institutions adapt, one thing is clear: we need more healthcare professionals. This proposal addresses that need by training physicians to serve rural communities. It also has the full endorsement of St. Cloud State University and St. Cloud Technical and Community College – two institutions that CentraCare collaborates with closely because they train health care professionals such as RNs, LPNs, respiratory therapists and more.

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.

Regards,



Ken Holmen, MD,
President & CEO
CentraCare