



Yellow Medicine County Attorney

Yellow Medicine County Justice Center
415 9th Avenue – Suite 101
Granite Falls, MN 56241
Telephone: 320-564-5832
Fax: 320-313-3011

Mark Gruenes – County Attorney

mark.gruenes@co.ym.mn.gov

Charles Paslawski – Asst. Co. Atty / **Tara Ulmaniec** – Asst. Co. Atty.

charles.paslawski@co.ym.mn.gov / tara.ulmaniec@co.ym.mn.gov

Linda Hagen – Victim Services Specialist

linda.hagen@co.ym.mn.gov

March 15, 2023

RE: SUPPORT FOR HF46/SF55 – YOUTH RESTORATIVE JUSTICE BILL

Dear Members of the Minnesota State Legislature

I am writing in support of Representative Feist's Bill HF46/SF55. I have been a volunteer for the Restorative Justice Program in Yellow Medicine County for 16 years. In addition, I have been working as a Victim Advocate for the Yellow Medicine County Attorney Office for the last 6½ years.

As a volunteer for this program, I can attest to the beautiful changes I have seen in the youth that have gone through this program. It's like watching a caterpillar turn into a butterfly! Our country is looking at crime rates that are higher than ever and the government seems to want to find a way to curb this crime. I believe one of the best ways to start combatting this crime is to start with the youth and their families. This program gives the youth an opportunity to keep their record clean and get on the right path at the same time. Over the years, I have watched troubled kids become untroubled and productive citizens in the community. We seem to find that it isn't just the incident that happened that we need to work with the kids on, but oftentimes, there are issues at home and school, etc. With this program, the volunteers can dig deeper and offer help to the kids with things like homework so the struggle in school isn't there, maybe it's help working through bullying issues at school, or maybe it's helping them get sober and stay sober, or help the parents with disciplining of their child. In short – Circle can work with the whole child. In the Circles that I have been a part of, volunteers have encouraged the child to participate in extra-curricular activities and the volunteers go the activities to show their support for them. These things may seem trivial, but they let the child know that someone cares and it helps break down barriers that they are facing and helps them build trust and relationships in and with other adults. I have seen several kids that have went through the program become successful adults – many of whom still contact me to keep me posted on how they are doing. Two youth that we worked with were facing felony charges. They worked hard in the program, graduated, and have since went

on to become police officers. One youth is now working in a bank and doing well with her two small children. I could go on and on. I LOVE, LOVE, LOVE this program and wish every single county in the State of Minnesota and every State in the United States could get this program started!!

As a Victim Advocate for the County, I have witnessed how this program also helps the victims of the youth. I have worked with the Restorative Justice Program to figure out ways for kids to get restitution paid to the victim and it works! Victims are able to attend Circle at some point before the child graduates from Circle if they would like to. When they attend, the victims almost always express satisfaction in the progress the youth made during the Circle process. One victim and Restorative Justice youth actually became good friends throughout the process and remain friends today. When I work with victims and explain the Circle process to them, most are very on board with us referring the child on to Circle as most are wanting rehabilitation rather than punishment or having the child separated from their families, which would upset their family and school life and make for even more mental health issues if they were already suffering from that.

I believe that by funneling money into the Restorative Justice program, the State would be making a major step in the right direction to combat crime. I hope you take the crime problem we have going on the State of Minnesota seriously enough to vote for this bill as I believe by implementing this program in our counties, the State will be proactive rather than reactive on this issue and it will help everyone in the long run.

If you have any questions about this program, I would be more than happy to answer them. Please feel free to contact me at work at 320-564-5832 or my personal cell phone of 507-530-5219 after 4:00 p.m.

Sincerely,



Linda Hagen
Victim Service Specialist
Yellow Medicine County Attorney Office
320-564-5832
linda.hagen@co.ym.mn.gov