



March 8, 2022

To: Members of the House Human Services Finance and Policy Committee

Re: HF3215 (Fischer)

Dear Chair Schultz and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota's (LSS) support of HF3215 (Fischer) for immediate investment to recruit and retain mental health providers to address the serious and increasing mental health needs of Minnesotans. LSS is a provider of essential services across all 87 counties with more than 2,500 employees serving one in 65 Minnesotans. We are committed to innovative, person-centered service delivery that promotes resiliency and long-term stability for people in all stages of life.

We believe that behavioral health builds the foundation for health and well-being, and our services provide individuals and families with critical access to mental health care in communities across the state – often in areas with few options for access to these services. As an essential community provider, LSS offers services to anyone, regardless of their ability to pay. We pride ourselves on working with anyone who contacts us and connecting them to a continuum of integrated services that reflect compassion, integrity and respect for all individuals from a comprehensive, strength-based approach.

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was already difficult for Minnesota's mental health system to sustainably and adequately meet the needs of individuals and families. Rates for mental health services have not covered the true cost of service for several years, limiting our ability as community mental health providers to sustain competitive wages and benefits that reflect the professionalism and importance of the services being provided. We have seen a consistent increase in people seeking mental health services, especially in the last 12 months and the severe shortage of qualified mental health workers coupled with unsustainable rates has made it challenging to provide adequate and stable resources to our neighbors.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity. LSS commits to ongoing partnership in developing, recruiting and strengthening a strong and diverse workforce that supports the growing mental health needs of all Minnesotans. If we can be of service on these issues, please reach out to me or our Senior Director of Advocacy, Erin Sutton, at erin.sutton@lssmn.org.

Sincerely,

Trevor B. Johnson, MSW, LICSW

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "TBJ", written over a white background.

Senior Director of Behavioral Health Services
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