

March 8, 2021

Dear Members of the Education Finance Committee:

Schools are often the place where the signs of a mental illness are first recognized. Whether its support from a school counselor or treatment from a school-linked mental health provider, many students access mental health services and supports in their schools. Students with mental illnesses have higher suspension and dropout rates, poor transition planning, and are more likely to experience the use of seclusions and restraints. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many students were facing significant challenges with their mental health, including an increasing number of students at risk of suicide. With distance learning placing a great deal of stress on students, particularly those with disabilities and mental illnesses, our concerns about students' mental health are growing.

NAMI Minnesota supports HF 1742 and efforts to increase the number of school support personnel. School counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, nurses, and chemical dependency counsellors all have a crucial role to play in the continuum of supports for Minnesota students. Not every student will require the more intensive intervention from a school-linked mental health provider. In many situations, the support from a school social worker is enough to get a student back on track and ready to learn. Increasing funding for schools to hire additional school support personnel will only be effective if we make efforts to expand the workforce. HF 1742 also takes important steps in this direction. NAMI Minnesota is especially appreciative of the efforts to expand the BIPOC school support personnel workforce.

NAMI Minnesota also supports the efforts in HF 1742 to track outcomes like school climate in the schools that were able to add school support personnel. We will be particularly interested in seeing the reports from schools that are able to offer adequate access to student support personnel, school-linked mental health services, and multi-tiered systems of support like PBIS. Investments across the continuum of mental health supports for students will decrease suspensions and other forms of exclusionary discipline, keep students on track to graduate, and ensure that every Minnesota student gets the right level of support at the right time.

The Legislature needs to act now to ensure access to school support personnel, school-linked mental health services for those who need a higher level of care, and multi-tiered systems of support like PBIS. Thank you for your work to address student mental illness this session.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director

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