

March 20, 2023

Members of the Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, we are writing in support of HF 46. Understanding about mental health has advanced greatly in a relatively short amount of time. We have adopted brain imaging technology, medications, and new successful models of therapy. At the same time there has been a movement across many different disciplines that recognizes that punitive measures have a limited scope of effectiveness in producing certain outcomes. Throughout our schools, workplaces, and homes we have shifted values as a society recognizing the impact of positive approaches. In pursuit of outcomes like wellness and connection we changed our practices.

Our knowledge, especially about children, has progressed exponentially in only the last several decades. Now, we understand brain development and trauma. We know that incentives work to change behavior. We know it is counterintuitive to try and build positive connections and safety by withholding connection and safety in the first place. With this in mind we support restorative justice practices.

Restorative justice, when practiced with fidelity, holds people accountable. There may be a misconception that restorative justice lets people off easy, however the opposite is true. Over 90% of court cases in the U.S. justice system are resolved through a plea deal. It's possible and common, in fact, for people to be convicted, sentenced, incarcerated, and released with hardly any interaction with their victim or any reflection on the impact of their crime at all. Participants in restorative justice programs are required to truly face what they have done, and in most cases who they have harmed. They must make direct connections to the harm done and the actions they can take to repair that harm.

While victim involvement should always be the choice of the victim, our current system fails to account for the many complex relationships between victims and perpetrators like partners and spouses, and parents and children. Restorative justice recognizes that all parties need restoration and transformation to achieve safety and wellness in our communities. We believe these principles are critical to promoting good mental health in our communities – connection instead of isolation, hope instead of fear. We are committed to being a part of growing restorative justice programs in our state, beginning in our juvenile justice system. Please support HF 46.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director

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