

February 12, 2025

Representative Nolan West
2nd Floor, Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair West and Members of the House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee:

I write today on behalf of the Minnesota Department of Health in opposition to House File 22. This bill conflicts with established Minnesota laws that allow minors to consent to critical healthcare services, including mental health care, substance use treatment, select immunizations, and emergency treatment. Removing legal protections that allow minors in vulnerable situations to access care puts children and young adults at risk and conflicts with current public health and best practices.

This bill creates confusion among providers whose medical oaths and training require that they provide care in accord with Best Practices. Best Practices require adolescent confidentiality to enable youth to feel comfortable discussing sensitive health issues with their providers. As a result of this bill, teen and school-based health clinics would reduce services such as mental health counseling for those 16 and older, substance use counseling and referrals for treatment, and STI testing and treatment. This could also prevent young people from seeking and receiving timely health care.

When minors don't have confidentiality protections while speaking with providers, like a school nurse, it can lead to delayed or denied access to care during crisis. It can also lead to a minor not being fully honest with their providers for fear of a parent's reaction. This is especially important when minors are experiencing abuse or neglect, have questions about their sexual or reproductive health, mental health, or substance use.

Research on adolescent consent and confidentiality show that these practices protect the health of the young person, promote positive health behaviors and outcomes, avoid negative health outcomes, encourage young people to seek needed care, and increase communication with health care providers – all of which protects our public health.

When minors can't act on their own behalf, they have decreased engagement with health care which can lead to increased health problems including mental health concerns and missed time in school. This is especially important for youth that face barriers to care for sensitive health issues such as struggles with eating disorders, mental health, and safe and healthy relationships.

I appreciate this opportunity to share our concerns with House File 22. Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions or for further discussion.

Sincerely,



Wendy Underwood, Deputy Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Health