



# Minnesota Association of Community Mental Health Programs

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Representative Jennifer Schultz, Chair  
Human Services Finance and Policy Committee  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
February 16, 2021

Dear Madame Chair and Committee Members

On behalf of the Minnesota Association of Community Mental Health Programs (MACMHP), I am sending this letter to support Representative Bierman's House File 635 — school-linked mental health funding.

The Minnesota Association of Community Mental Health Programs (MACMHP) is the state's leading association for Community Mental Health Programs, representing 33 community-based mental health providers and agencies across the state. Collectively, we serve over 200,000 Minnesota families, children and adults. Our mission is to serve all who come to us seeking mental and chemical health services, regardless of their insurance status, ability to pay or where they live. As Essential Community Providers, we serve primarily culturally diverse, low-income, uninsured and public healthcare program insured Minnesotans, who cannot access services elsewhere. We serve our clients with comprehensive, coordinated care and love.

The majority of MACMHP member community mental health programs are partner mental health providers in the school-linked mental health program. MACMHP members co-locate mental health professionals/ therapists within our schools. We provide direct therapy services to children. We also function as part of the school team -

- following up with school staff,
- teaching staff skills for identifying a student's symptoms and de-escalation techniques
- coordinating services with school leadership
- follow up/ transition of services for students to access more intensive services in our clinic

The school-linked mental health grant allows us to work with school staff, coordinate care, deliver services to students without insurance or with very high out of pocket expenses. This grant allows us serve children and families beyond the walls of our clinic sites. This flexibility helps our client's greatly.

We increasingly see the mental health needs of children and families are spiking as they are dealing with the trauma of the pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and the countless unanswered questions about how to maintain economic stability, personal safety and a sense of future. As needs are spiking in community life, capacity to meet those needs is increasingly imperiled.

Under the pandemic environment, School-Linked Mental Health, is precarious. By its nature, School-Linked Mental Health was designed to remove barriers students had to accessing mental health support. The service specifically focuses on serving children and families who are otherwise not able to access mental health. Not surprisingly, with the onset of the pandemic, barriers only became more significant for children and families who were School-Linked Mental Health clients. With telehealth innovations, over half of students continue to receive supports. However, access to students, the length of session due to technology challenges, sustaining attentions and countless other interruptions have made telehealth a positive and temporary bridge for the unique School-Linked population.

As a result, School-Linked Mental Health providers are in significant risk of not being able to sustain their current infrastructure to continue to serve students and families in the coming school year. With the conclusion of the federal Paycheck Protection Program for eligible providers, and after almost six months of substantially diminished revenues, many providers are looking to layoffs as some of



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their only remedies. Prior to COVID, one of the greatest challenges for providers was recruitment and retention of mental health counselors. Providers are seeking all lifelines for a more durable solution that will allow them to prepare to deliver critical mental health support. The School-linked mental health program is a key component of our community mental health care system. Please support increasing funding to the program and House File 635.

Thank you for your consideration and support of the mental health needs of our children and families.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Jin Lee Palen', is positioned above the printed name.

Jin Lee Palen  
Executive Director  
Minnesota Association of Community Mental Health Programs | MACMHP