

March 1, 2022

Dear Members of the Committee on Education Policy:

NAMI Minnesota is writing in regard to HF3634 which would provide mental health screening in the schools. As everyone knows, the mental health of students has been negatively impacted by the pandemic.

We know that mental health emergency room visits among youth ages 12-17 increased by 31% between 2019 and 2020 and in 2021 the emergency room visits for suicide attempts was up 51% among girls in that same age range. Other data reflecting the needs of our students:

- Only one-third of high school students felt they were able to cope with their sources of stress
- One in three high school students and half of female students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness.
- Two thirds of parents report that their child has struggled with their mental health and a third say that their child's mental health is worse than before the pandemic.

While some though simply coming back to the classroom would alleviate the issue, it has not.

In a story on NBC the following was reported: *Dr. Jonathan Slater, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at New York Presbyterian Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital, said he refers to the growing number of Generation Z patients he treats for pandemic-related mental health issues as "the walking wounded." "I've coined the term 'Generation U' for this generation — Generation U for Uncertainty. I think the biggest challenges facing youth today are just the uncertainty in what's going to happen to them," he said.*

There are a number of things we need to do to address our students' mental health. Knowing how they are doing is a first step, and then making sure they can access a mental health professional for a diagnostic assessment and treatment is the second step. What we cannot do – is nothing. Our children and youth are struggling, and we need to support them so that they can become healthy adults.

Sincerely,



Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director