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WILDER
FOUNDATION

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May 4, 2021

Representative Tina Liebling, Co-Chair HHS Conference
Committee

Senator Michelle Benson, Co-chair HHS Conference Committee

Co-Chairs and Members of the 2021 Health and Human
Services Conference Committee,

On behalf of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, a direct service and research organization serving the east metro since 1906, we would like to provide our perspective on the opportunities and concerns as you begin your conference committee negotiations. The health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 have exacerbated many of the inequities that have plagued our state long before the pandemic. However, with a budget surplus, significant federal funds and a collective recognition that we must revisit our conceptions of health and healthcare delivery, we see significant opportunities for Minnesota in the health and human service area this legislative session.

Support

Behavioral Health Workforce – Minnesota is facing a workforce shortage in the behavioral health professions at a time when demand for services is growing. We urge you to include the provisions carried in **HF970(Vang)/SF1362(Utke)** which seek to eliminate multiple systemic barriers people face when seeking a career in the behavioral health field, with a particular eye toward the shortage of culturally specific providers in our state.

Telehealth – The pandemic has given us all a window into the power of expanding our use of telehealth as a tool in the continuum of services and access. We know that the conversation around audio-only services has been a complicated one. Our personal experience as a provider of behavioral health services, is that audio-only can help us reach clients who would otherwise forgo care. We fully support efforts to better study the

efficacy of telehealth. We appreciate the thoughtful leadership of Senator Rosen and Representative Morrison on this issue and look forward to continuing to refine the system to best serve Minnesotans.

Extending Postpartum MA Coverage Eligibility – At Wilder we believe that we need to pursue policies and services that support the whole family. The good health of a new parent after childbirth can help to ensure that the new baby is receiving all of the love and attention that it deserves. We appreciate that both the House and Senate bills include an expansion beyond 60 days and strongly support extending to the coverage to 12 months.

Birth equity – We are thrilled to see the focus in both chambers on prenatal and birthing care. The United States is an outlier compared to other wealthy nations in maternal morbidity and our state has alarming disparities for Black and Indigenous childbirth deaths. We strongly support efforts to create a system of care to eliminate these tragic incidents. Specifically, we would like to call out our support for **African American Babies Coalition and Projects (AABC) and Integrated Care for High Risk Pregnancies (ICHRP)** funding included in the House position. We have the honor of being the home of AABC and a central participant in the ICHRP work, and understand the life changing work done by each initiative.

Mental Health System Reform – As a large provider of outpatient behavioral health services, we are in strong supportive of efforts to streamline a complex administrative system. The **Uniform Service Standards** policy carried in both bills is years in the making and a huge step toward creating consistency across the mental health system. Additionally, we thank the legislature for its continued support of the **Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic** model.

Homelessness – We are in strong support of the investments into programs to support people experiencing homelessness in the house like the **Emergency Services Program** in the house. We also support the **Housing Supports** changes in the Senate bill allowing for longer absences without losing access to the benefit. Last year showed us again the growing need for stable housing and we support increased state investments to help people get housed.

Minnesota Family Investment Program – We strongly support many of the MFIP provisions across both bills. The emergency payment, economic assistance program uniformity and cost of living adjustment provisions in the house are fantastic. We also support the increase to the MFIP Housing Grant included in the senate bill.

Child Care – As a provider who serves clients who use the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and Early Learning Scholarships (ESL), we recognize the value in both models because they both allow more children access to essential early learning opportunities. **CCAP:** We are supportive of efforts to increase the CCAP reimbursement rate, policy changes to which will help CCAP reach as many families as possible, the proposed reform to the absent day policy and the shared inclusion of the Inclusive Child Care Grants proposal. **ESL:** We also support an increase to early learning scholarships which will allow more families to access the resource. We look forward to continuing the discussion around how to best utilize the federal funds to best support families and providers.

Concerns

Disability Waiver Caps – Wilder is a provider of Customized Living services for some public housing residents with Elderly and CADI waivers. We oppose the proposal to place a temporary cap on CADI and DD Waiver growth.

We appreciate all of the work done thus far to put together the House and Senate positions and look forward to working with you to create a final health and human services package that will help all Minnesotans to thrive.

Best regards,



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Pahoua K. Yang
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