

February 21, 2022

Dear Rep. Fischer and Members of the House Behavioral Health Policy Division,

At Volunteers of America of Minnesota (VOA of MN) we are deeply committed to serving children, youth, and families with services that meet their complex and unique needs. VOA of MN operates three children's residential treatment facilities in the state of Minnesota for children and adolescents who have histories of significant trauma and struggle with serious mental illness, and an array of mental health outpatient services in clinics and in community. Over the years, we have helped thousands of children return to stability after trauma and crisis.

Today we are writing in support of **HF3215** and urge you to take action to provide much needed relief to our employees who, in addition to providing essential mental health services, are also themselves feeling stretched and exhausted both personally and professionally.

One in five young people experience a mental health problem during their school years. For millions of children, treatment can transform lives-but not nearly enough have access to care. At Volunteers of America of Minnesota, we are working to close this gap. It is widely acknowledged that youth with mental illnesses and their families need access to the right level of mental health treatment at the right time, in whatever pathway best suits their needs.

Like many other behavioral health providers, VOA MN has experienced significant workforce shortages in an environment where demands for mental health services continue to increase. We have openings at every level of the organization, from front-line Residential Counselors at our Children's Residential Facilities, Social Workers, licensed Mental Health Therapists, and even administrators and support staff. In the past 23 months, staffing shortages forced us to close one residential unit and limit census at our residential facilities. Almost without exception, everyone has worked extra hours and therapists have taken on ever-increasing caseloads to support the young people we serve.

The demand for services far exceeds our ability to appropriately staff to meet these needs. The net result is that at any given time, about 100 children or youth have been on a waitlist to receive either outpatient or residential services. As an organization that prides ourselves on having a "never give up" approach to enable young people to reach their full potential, this feels defeating.

Once again, thank you for your leadership and service on behalf of children, youth, and families. Please do not hesitate to contact me at Julie.Manworren@voamn.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Julie Manworren
President and CEO