



March 21, 2023

To: Members of the House Health Finance and Policy Committee
RE: HF346 (Reyer)

Dear Chair Liebling and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share **Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota's support of HF346**. Immediate investment in rates for community-based mental health services is critical to maintain access to mental health care for our neighbors. LSS is a provider of essential services serving one in 65 Minnesotans every year including behavioral health services. In 2022, LSS Behavioral Health provided supports to 2,886 people in 84 counties through 21,143 in-person therapy visits, 10,297 telehealth visits, 70 employer groups, 14 school partnerships, and 2 shelter-linked mental health partnerships.

We pride ourselves on working with anyone who contacts us and connecting them to a continuum of integrated services that reflect compassion, integrity, and respect. However, providers are experiencing multiple challenges to meet the needs of Minnesotans accessing community-based mental health services. Challenges include years of operating with reimbursement rates far below the true cost of service and a severe shortage of well-qualified and licensed mental health providers. Further, these challenges are compounded with an increase in demand for services and people seeking services with highly complex and acute care needs.

LSS sustains our mental health services because we know mental health is a foundation for health and well-being. Access to mental health care is essential, especially for those who are also navigating significant life challenges including financial challenges, housing instability, and food insecurity. LSS is committed to maintaining and sustaining access to mental health services across the state and has made significant investments over the years to offset the operating losses due to low reimbursement rates. We are committed to protecting access for all who come through our doors regardless of the type of insurance they have or how they will pay for services.

As we await the establishment of a future rate structure currently under design by the Department of Human Services, **please support HF346 to establish mental health bridge funding**. This is critical to maintain access to services and build back a strong workforce.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity. Please contact Erin Sutton, LSS' Senior Director of Advocacy, at erin.sutton@lssmn.org if we may provide further information on this deeply important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "TBJ", is written over a white background.

Trevor B. Johnson, MSW, LICSW
Senior Strategy Director – Behavioral Health
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota