



February 22, 2022

Representative Peter Fischer, Committee Chair
Behavioral Policy Division
Minnesota House of Representatives

Dear Representative Fischer:

My name is Julie Sjodal, I am the Chief Executive Officer of St. David's Center, a nonprofit organization with a mission to build relationships that nurture the development of every child and family. We do this important work through providing a range of critically needed services to over 4,000 children and families across the Twin Cities metro community. A major focus of our organization's work is providing mental health services for children and families that have faced significant challenges throughout their young lives, exacerbated by the pandemic.

We have a range of mental health services which include in-home, school-based, outpatient services and intensive day treatment. Many of our clients are underinsured and/or utilize Medical Assistance (MA) benefits. We are deeply committed to this work to not only address the suffering that so many children in our community are facing, but also to provide interventions that can change the developmental trajectories for children over their lifetime.

I am writing today to ask you and the House Behavioral Health Policy Committee to support the HF 3215 bill that includes an appropriation for community mental health program workforce relief emergency grants.

As a community based mental health organization, we have struggled tremendously due to the workforce challenges we are all facing. Our waiting list for mental health services has grown to hundreds of families during the pandemic, and our experience providing services to nearly 2,000 children this past year tells us the prevalence, acuity, and complexity of needs has never been higher – and not just for children, but for the whole family. While we are often an employer of choice in our community, we have seen an unprecedented departure of mental health staff and it has caused tremendous stress on our remaining team. We have also had to increase our payrates significantly in the past year to keep pace with market trends and inflation. We have done so with no increases in our MA reimbursement rates for several years. The mental health system that is a safety net for so many distressed children and families in our community is at risk of buckling under the financial pressures so many of us are facing as we strive to keep our programs alive through these times.

We urge you to support this bill so that mental health programs provided by St. David's Center and so many other organizations across Minnesota can keep our doors open and our critically needed services available to children and families.

With gratitude for your leadership and service,

Julie Sjodal
Chief Executive Officer