



## Family Service Center

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An Equal Opportunity Employer

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### Letter of Support for HF46/SF55 - Youth Restorative Justice Bill

Dear Members of the Minnesota State Legislature,

I write in support of Rep. Feist's Bill HF46/SF55. I believe HF46/SF55 would open a path for youth across Minnesota to access restorative practices as a healing accountability process. This bill is a critical step to ensuring that young people in Minnesota have access to accountability processes that are meaningful, effective, and grounded in relationships. The juvenile court was created because of an acknowledgment by the community that youth are not the same as adults.<sup>1</sup> The incarceration and punishment of youth are not helpful for young people or their families and disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous youth of color, and those with disabilities.

HF46/55 will help address the inequalities in youth detainment, and offer criminalized youth opportunities to take on accountability, prevent youth crime, and further public safety in our community.

I support more Restorative Justice options to increase community ties with criminalized youth. Restorative Justice lenses prioritize relationships while healing harm and addressing the root causes of harm. HF46/SF55 will address the root causes of harm caused by youth and work to prepare youth to be better members of our community. Young people's recidivism is reduced when given more options and opportunities outside the traditional justice system.

Locally, we know that youth who have had access to a restorative process at the first point of contact with law enforcement are 2.5 times less likely to have contact with law enforcement in the following year.<sup>2</sup> This is compared with their peers who followed the traditional legal process, who are 1.5 times more likely to be arrested again within the following year. These trends hold true for Greater Minnesota, where there is a long history of offering restorative practices to youth and families. Yellow Medicine County's Juvenile Circle Sentencing Program reports a 0% recidivism rate within a year of their circles, 100% restitution paid, and an overwhelming majority of youth and families

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<sup>1</sup> Minn. Stat. 660B.001, subd. 2.

<sup>2</sup> See University of Minnesota Evaluation of Pre-Charge Diversion in Minneapolis:  
[https://prc.umn.edu/sites/prc.umn.edu/files/2021-05/YRJPT\\_infographics.pdf](https://prc.umn.edu/sites/prc.umn.edu/files/2021-05/YRJPT_infographics.pdf)

reporting a positive experience and a sense of care from community members.<sup>3</sup>

Removing youth from the community or imposing an order full of consequences in these situations makes behavior worse – it sends a message to the youth that they don't belong in the community and that community isn't a place that can help them learn how to handle being overwhelmed or how to participate in harm repair. Community-led restorative justice circles will offer positive youth interactions with community experts and leaders. Keeping youth in their home communities allows them to maintain familial relationships, reduces stigma, and allows them to form new relationships through the practices.

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of Minnesota's youth and for considering this important step to expand a path for restorative practices within systems, address racial disparities in Minnesota's communities, and ensure that Minnesotans have full access to meaningful accountability from a young age.

Sincerely,

Rae Ann Keeler-Aus  
Director

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<sup>3</sup> See Anne G. Buchanan (2020) Seventeen years of restorative justice circles: The Yellow Medicine County experience, *Contemporary Justice Review*, 23:4, 319-336, pg. 9, DOI: [10.1080/10282580.2019.1700375](https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2019.1700375)