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Written testimony in support of the school-based health provisions in the Health and Human Services omnibus bill

Dear Conference Committee,

Thank you for your history of supporting our children's safety net programs and in particular, school-based health centers. My name is Linda Dick-Olson and I am therapist within our Health Start program at Minnesota Community Care, a community health center, as well as the Director of Behavioral Health for our organization.

I have worked for over 20 years in my role as school-based therapist. I started on 9/11/2001, addressing a crisis with students. I know that this model of care works from experience. We can address the whole child's needs, keep kids in school and improve their learning by offering mental health care that is equitable and accessible. We do this hand in hand with school support staff.

In recent years, we have as a community, nation and as a world, experienced multiple stressors, and traumas. We as adults have been impacted, but those who have been the most impacted are those who are the most vulnerable.

In the first half of 2020, we worked hand in hand with school support staff, which is essential in school-based care, to provide students and their families a needed connection during one of the most challenging times in our recent history. We were able to provide mental health services by quickly pivoting to provide telehealth care, so that students and families were able to stay safe and continue to be supported. Once returning to schools, we responded to the elevated needs of the students walking through our doors and provided them with a place to heal and to learn healthy coping skills.

Last time I spoke before you, I spoke of a client who I worked with both during and after the pandemic. When I first met with her, she struggled with anxiety and struggled with attendance, self-esteem, school performance and peer interactions. During our work together, she improved her attendance, has become an almost straight A student, has made several new friends and has started trying new activities outside of school.

Other students were not as connected over the pandemic and had a very different experience. They had been left alone during that 12+ months when our world went on pause. Many of the clients who I have been since the pandemic started have much higher rates of depression, anxiety and general dysregulation. Their families were those who already struggled before the pandemic and they and their families were isolated during that time. Those students struggle to stay in class, to feel hopeful about their futures and are disconnected from their peers. I think of a young person who I am currently working with who's family struggled due to mom feeling stuck in an emotionally and financially abusive relationship. The student came in wary, worried, and sad. They had been referred to me due to seeming shut down since returning to school earlier that year. Mom had shared that they while they used to be close, they now sat in their room all day. During our time together, they learned to talk about the hard things in their lives to find ways to both ask for help from those around them that cared and ways to

take care of themselves during a difficult situation. Their relationship with their mom improved during our time together, they were able to speak to mom about their worries for mom. This was not a treatment goal, but mom was inspired by the growth they saw their child make and they ended up going to counseling as well and eventually left the abusive relationship.

These students are just two examples of clients who would not otherwise have been able to access therapy and are both better off because of it. The support we provide students in school helps them, their families, and their learning.

Please fully fund the School Health provisions in the Health and Human Services omnibus bill as you see it will provide funding to current and new school-based health initiatives, support quality care and equitable access for students, and formalize the relationship between MN School Based Health Alliance and the MN Department of Health.

Thank you,

Linda Dick-Olson