



Community Mental Health Services

 **KANDIYOHI CENTER-MAIN OFFICE**
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*Representative Jennifer Schultz, Chair
Human Services Policy & Finance Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
February 23, 2021*

Dear Chair Schultz and Committee Members

On behalf of Woodland Centers, I am sending this letter to support Representative Vang's House File 970 - Culturally informed behavioral health training requirements and culturally diverse workforce development support.

Woodland Centers is a private non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. We are a comprehensive community mental health center established in 1958. We serve seven rural counties in the west central region of Minnesota - Chippewa, Big Stone, Kandiyohi, Lac Qui Parle, Meeker, Renville, and Swift - with offices in each of those counties. Woodland Centers catchment area encompasses approximately 5000 square miles with a population of approximately 114,000. In 2020, Woodland Centers served approximately 6,650 unduplicated individuals whose ages ranged from 1 to 99. Woodland Centers' mission is to support people of all ages in finding hope and recovery. Our core values are willingness (we do what it takes), knowledge (we seek to understand, learn and grow) and leadership (we inspire change). At Woodland Centers, we believe connections transform lives. We create connections by partnering, serving and empowering each other in order to inspire courage, hope and lasting change.

As a community mental (and chemical) health program and safety net provider, Woodland Centers serves clients and communities who would not has access to mental and chemical health care.

Our staff are key/ critical to our ability to provide high quality care to our clients and communities. Our entire behavioral health system is facing a workforce crisis, with more providers retiring than are coming into the field. The shortage is particularly true for our communities of color, whose members

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face even more barriers to accessing care and inequities. Woodland Centers supports HF 970's proposal to further diversify our workforce through more diversity training and increased funding/investment into education and training supports to allow more students and workers from communities of color to enter the mental health workforce.

Most importantly, the bill -

- *convenes a workgroup to address barriers in the current professional licensure process and consider an alternative licensure pathway.*
- *expands the definition of a mental health practitioner to include students completing internships while in their programs (graduate or undergraduate). This way students, particularly non-traditional students with families and children, do not have to choose between completing their degree and making wages to feed their families. This also allows agencies to hire more mental health practitioners, under a wider net of eligibility.*

All the proposals in HF 970 are a first step, but an important first step, to bringing more diverse staff candidates into the mental and chemical health fields. Thank you for your consideration and support of the mental health care needs of our diverse communities and our mental health care system in Minnesota. Please support House File 970.

Sincerely

*Ashely Kjos, PsyD, LP
CEO
Woodland Centers*

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