

May 1, 2023

Dear Chair Liebling, Chair Wiklund, and Members of the Health and Human Services Conference Committee:

On behalf of all residents of Ramsey County I want to thank you for your efforts to create public health and human services systems that work for all Minnesotans. There is a lot to like in these bills and as you work together to craft the omnibus package we wanted to connect and share Ramsey County's thoughts on a few items.

### **Ramsey County Continuum of Care Homelessness Funding**

As a lead partner in the Heading Home Ramsey continuum of care work, we know the need for statewide homelessness dollars is imperative this year. We need the House-level funding and the Senate's direct appropriation to the county for the Heading Home Ramsey homelessness work. The Senate bill contains \$6.8 million each year for a direct appropriation of DHS' Emergency Services Program dollars, which is a partial funding of our \$15 million annual request for five years (SF 2032). This state-funding is crucial to continue the coordinated, successful work to address the unsheltered needs in the East Metro. Without significant investment this year our advancements will slide backwards, it will cost more to provide the help needed in future years, and our residents, businesses, and homeless will suffer.

### **DHS Technology Funding**

We appreciate the recognition of the need to address the outdated technology currently used by counties and DHS to support critical human services programs. One-time surplus dollars are a perfect opportunity to make investments in technology that will pay dividends into the future. We support the appropriations in the Governor's budget to address METS, MMIS, HMIS, SSIS, MAXIS, and MEC2 systems. Updating these systems will not only improve services for Minnesota residents, it will also improve our ability to retain our workforce by removing the need for employees work with clunky, outdated systems that are often older than our workers are.

In addition, it is essential that the state work with the counties in partnership to co-create these technology solutions to ensure that they will work for both the county workers and the people served. As primary users and with firsthand knowledge of their impact on our residents, counties' perspective is needed to work collaboratively with the state to modernize and build the future human services ecosystem. Additionally, there will be a need for modifications to county-provided technology that complement and depend on these systems. Therefore, we ask that investments at the state level be paired with investments at the county level.

### **Mental Health Investments**

We are pleased to support the broad approach to investments in our behavioral health systems. We know that Minnesota individuals, families, and children continue to be crippled by mental health issues that cannot adequately be addressed by our under-resourced, fractured support system. We also appreciate the unified support of psychiatric residential treatment facility start-up and specialization grants. Ramsey County supports funding and continued build-out of the 988 suicide and crisis help line as another strategy to meet individual mental health needs statewide. We do ask you to consider including ongoing funding for the Youth Mental Health Urgency Room, established by the 2022 legislature. Ramsey County is excited to offer this resource that provides a specialized place for youth in mental health crisis to go instead of a chaotic emergency room and we would appreciate ongoing funding for this unique effort ([SF 2960/HF 2992](#)).

**Lead Poisoning Prevention:** The provision to lower the statutory elevated blood lead level is admirable. Ramsey County public health staff currently do in-person home assessments for children in our communities who currently hit the 5mg/dcl trigger point. The proposed reduction, which is excellent for children since there is no safe level of lead exposure, will result in a doubling of the children that would benefit from our services (per MDH data). As such, we would appreciate financial assistance of \$500,000/year to help us address this increased workload and ensure that these newly identified kids can get the help that they need.

Thank you again for your work in service to the State of Minnesota. In the days ahead please feel free to reach out to us with any questions you may have or to ask for any assistance you may need. Your work is critical to the well-being of all Minnesotans, and we are proud to be your partner in these efforts.

Thank you,



Commissioner Trista MatasCastillo  
Ramsey County Board Chair  
Ramsey County Legislative Committee Chair



Commissioner Rena Moran  
Ramsey County Commissioner, District 4  
Ramsey County Legislative Committee Vice Chair

Cc: Governor Tim Walz, Speaker Melissa Hortman, Majority Leader Kari Dziedzic