

Representative Mohamad Noor, Chair  
Human Services Finance Committee  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
February 9, 2023



Dear Chair and Committee Members

On behalf of Washburn Center for Children, I am sending this letter to support Representative Bierman's House File 564 – increase funding to the school-linked mental health program.

Washburn Center for Children leads in child-centered care with the broadest and deepest spectrum of outpatient children's mental health services in Minnesota. With one of the largest teams of children's mental health therapists, our community-based model is strengthened by families and children served and grounded by impact that reaches to family networks, neighborhoods, schools and communities.

More than 40 schools in Minneapolis, Bloomington, Eden Prairie and several specialized settings have therapists on site to support scholars where they learn and grow. As one of the largest providers of school-based mental health services, Washburn Center partners with teachers, administrators and parents to help children thrive academically, developmentally and socially. We provide direct therapy services to children. We also function as part of the school team:

- following up with school staff and teaching them skills to identify and de-escalation techniques
- coordinating services with school leadership
- connecting students to services if they need access to more intensive services in our clinic

The school-linked mental health grant allows us to work with school staff, coordinate care, and deliver services to students without insurance or with very high out of pocket expenses. This grant allows us serve children and families beyond the walls of our clinics. This flexibility helps our client's greatly. By its nature, School-Linked Mental Health was designed to remove barriers students had to accessing mental health support. The service specifically focuses on serving children and families who are otherwise not able to access mental health. Not surprisingly, with the onset of the pandemic, barriers only became more significant for children and families who were School-Linked Mental Health clients.

Our partnership with schools has increased access to mental health services and been successful in reaching families who may not have had an avenue to care or faced barriers, like economics. In fact, 73% of families served are experiencing financial hardship. Our team is responding to a steep increase and ever-growing complex demands of the children's mental health crisis. That crisis threatens the learning of this generation as there's no indication we've seen the peak and school success is closely related since untreated mental health can be a significant barrier to learning.

We increasingly see the mental health needs of children and families are spiking as they are dealing with the trauma of the pandemic and the countless unanswered questions about how to maintain economic stability, personal safety and a sense of future. As needs are spiking in community life, capacity to meet those needs is increasingly imperiled. Prior to and exacerbated by COVID, the greatest challenges for providers is recruitment and retention of mental health counselors. Providers are seeking all lifelines for a more durable solution that will allow them to prepare to deliver critical mental health support. The School-linked mental health program is a key component of our community mental health care system. Please support increasing funding to the program and House File 564.

Thank you for your consideration and support of the mental health needs of our children and families.

Sincerely,

Craig Warren, CEO, Washburn Center for Children



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