



February 6, 2023

REPRESENTATIVE MOHAMUD NOOR, CHAIR
HUMAN SERVICES FINANCE COMMITTEE
MINNESOTA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Dear Chair Noor and Committee Members,

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

Woodland Centers is a private non-profit 501(c)(3) 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. Woodland Centers catchment area encompasses approximately 5000 square miles with a population of approximately 114,000.

Approximately 75% of the clients served at Woodland Centers are enrolled in Minnesota Health Care Programs and another 15% are enrolled in Medicare. Approximately 90% of our clients are eligible for sliding fee scale reductions and around 85% of these individuals are provided a 100% sliding fee scale reduction. Woodland Centers serves approximately 5,000 unduplicated individuals each year ranging in age from toddlers to the elderly.

Woodland Centers provides school-linked mental health services in 14 school districts across our region equating to over 40 different buildings within these districts. We place mental health professionals and mental health practitioners in the schools to provide assessments, therapy, skills, and consultation to the students, parents, and staff of the districts. Our staff provide coordination of services, education and

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training to school staff, and transition services for students needing more or less intensive services. Our staff function as a part of the school team and are truly integrated into the school systems.

The school-linked mental health grant allows us to work with school staff, coordinate care, 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 clinic sites. 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.

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,

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Ashley Kjos, Psy.D., L.P.

Chief Executive Officer

Woodland Centers