



March 6, 2024

379 State Office Building
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 5155

Dear Representative Noor,

I am writing to thank you for your leadership and express my support for HF3642 to establish medical assistance enrollment and medical assistance coverage for prerelease care transition services to incarcerated individuals. As the Hennepin County Sheriff, this is a top legislative priority for our office as we have witnessed the challenges faced by our jail population, particularly those with mental illness, due to restrictions on Medicaid funding for inmates.

Under federal law, Medicaid funds and services cannot be utilized for healthcare provided to inmates of jails, prisons, or youth correctional facilities, except in cases requiring a hospital stay. Consequently, individuals with mental illness, who constitute approximately half of our jail population, often experience disruptions or changes in their treatment upon incarceration due to a transition to a "suspended" Medicaid status.

The continuity of care issue is significant, as uninterrupted access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is essential for managing mental health conditions and addiction effectively. Without proper treatment and support, incarcerated individuals with mental illness face heightened risks of deterioration in their condition, increased incidents of behavioral disturbances, and diminished prospects for successful reintegration into society upon release.

As you know, Section 1115 of the Social Security Act empowers the Secretary of Health and Human Services to approve state projects aimed at promoting the objectives of the Medicaid program. By obtaining a Section 1115 Waiver and passing HF 3642 with an extension to pre-trial coverage, Minnesota can secure Medicaid funding to cover essential healthcare services, including mental health and substance use treatment, for incarcerated individuals. Our colleagues in other states who have applied for this waiver emphasize the importance of Sheriffs' inclusion in the entire process due to our responsibility to oversee the county jails. Please consider me a partner in both the efforts to apply for and implement this important policy.

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The urgency of addressing this issue cannot be overstated, especially as we discuss changes to the 48-hour rule and the priority admissions process which will impact the large population of civilly committed inmates into our jails. With the number of mentally ill inmates on the rise, we must take proactive measures to ensure they receive the care and support they need during their incarceration, from the moment they arrive at our facility until they are released.

In conclusion, thank you again for your work to pass HF3642 and advocate for the submission, approval, and implementation of a Section 1115 Waiver for Minnesota. By addressing the critical issue of healthcare access for incarcerated individuals, we can promote public health, reduce recidivism, and create a more equitable and compassionate criminal justice system.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to continuing to work together to ensure the well-being of our community.

Sincerely,



Sheriff Dawanna Witt

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