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March 21, 2023

ATTN: Chair Wiklund and Committee Members

I am writing on behalf of Fernbrook Family Center as a request that you support **SF926**. This bill would be instrumental in building capacity and infrastructure to provide mental health services to kids and families in Minnesota.

The needs of kids and families have increased significantly and the lack of access to mental health services is putting them at great risk. Provider shortages and burnout are problematic and worsening.

In my 12+ years in this field I have seen staff struggle with waiting lists and burnout, but not to the level they are at this time. This work is incredibly challenging and stressful and providers are struggling with capacity to serve. We recently had a staff meeting and multiple staff were in tears because they are struggling with the emotional burden of turning away clients due to waiting lists, but they simply do not have time to add more clients to their waiting lists.

Our intake team is overwhelmed with calls daily from frantic and upset caregivers because they desperately want their child to receive mental health services and everywhere they call says they are not taking new clients. We recently had a mother call because her 14 year old daughter has attempted suicide 3 times in the last year and is refusing to attend school. This mother has quit her job to stay home with her daughter to keep her safe and monitor her. This mother had called 6 places before calling us and every single place had said they can't help because they are not accepting new referrals. A mother should not bear this burden alone so we scrambled and found a provider who could start providing therapy to support this mother and daughter. I am grateful we were able to help, but I worry about the burden on our staff of often feeling as though they are someone's only hope for help and feeling as though they can't say no.

This bill would be instrumental in investing in our capacity to serve kids and families. Long-term solutions are being discussed and worked on, but we have an immediate crisis that can't wait for these solutions. We need immediate and significant investment in a workforce that has dedicated their lives to serving and helping our most vulnerable constituents.

We ask that you vote to support **SF926** during the hearing on March 21, 2023!

Thank you!

Shannon Brown, MS, LPCC

Chief Executive Officer

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