

Dear Legislators,

On behalf of our Board of Directors, 522 staff, over 4,000 children and families, and thousands of donors and volunteers, we are writing today to express our support for two bills that will make a tremendous difference in the lives of children and families we serve.

1) **Bridge for Mental Health Rates, HF346/SF926:** Medicaid rates for Community-Based Mental Health Care are the greatest barrier to meeting children's mental health needs. Reimbursements are significantly beneath costs. Though a new rate structure is under development, it is years from implementation. Bridge funding must be immediately invested to assure timely access to quality mental health care. St. David's Center employs over 150 mental health therapists providing a continuum of mental health services – from intensive home-based psychotherapy and day treatment services for young children with autism and early childhood mental health needs to weekly outpatient therapy and case management services - at our two mental health clinics in Minneapolis and Minnetonka, at 15 schools and early learning programs, and in hundreds of family homes across the Twin Cities. The majority of our early intervention clients are on Medical Assistance. Over 1,600 families waited for mental health services last year. Many providers like St. David's Center would grow our reach and meet more of this increasing need if reimbursement rates were commensurate with expenses. The Bridge Bill will not only sustain current services, but it is also critical as we consider growth this next year.

2) **Family-Centered Mental Health, HF1198/SF1174:** Caring for children with mental illness must include families. Increasing specialized in-home teams, supporting transitions, and growing a continuum to respond to individual needs are critical to quality care. This bill includes modifications in non-emergency transportation to be child friendly and assure regular access to treatment, expansion of effective models such as Collaborative Intensive Bridging Services, Shelter-Linked and School-Linked Mental Health, the use of Family Peer Support Specialists, and growth of in-home treatment models. As one of the largest early childhood day treatment providers in the state, St. David's Center's families rely on non-emergency medical transportation to access trajectory-changing services. We are constantly faced with challenges related to transportation, largely related to inconsistency leading to disruptions in service and providers who are ill-prepared to serve young children struggling with mental health needs. In addition, investments in proven models, family peer support, and in-home treatment will ensure greater access to quality care. Many of the families will experience the greatest benefit from less traditional services, models with evidence – nationally, in our state, and deeply in organizations like ours. We see the impact every day.

We would respectfully ask you to please prioritize children and family mental health in this legislative session. **Greater access to quality care is within reach.** Without this legislature's investment, our state will be paying the price for generations to come. Please support and continue to prioritize the Bridge for Mental Health Rates and the Family-Centered Mental Health Bills.

Thank you,



Julie Sjrdal, Chief Executive Officer