

Chairs Wiklund and Mann,

Please accept this message in support SF2995, School Health: Article 2, Section 69 (page 103). This funding is paramount to deepen and expand the impact of school based clinics in Minnesota and just down the road at St. Paul City School.

School-based health centers (SBHCs) have been strongholds of accessible, equitable and comprehensive preventive care for students in Minnesota for 50 years. If passed, this legislation would be the first state policy and dedicated funding to support school-based health centers in that time. An investment in SBHCs at this pivotal time for the health of children and communities would be historic.

The gold-standard model for school-based clinics had its genesis here in St Paul, Minnesota, and is now codified in federal statute. Today, over 2,200 school-based health centers operate across the U.S. Until 2022, our local School Based Health Alliance was a voluntarily coalition of the leaders who operate school-based clinics. In MN, there are now 29 providing care to nearly 15,000 students, and at least 11 in development. The Alliance represents and supports each of the health care providers and districts.

The Alliance is a long-term community partner of the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). MDH has provided a convener to support this work since 2015 when the Alliance became an official affiliate of the national School-Based Health Alliance. In January, MDH extended a CDC COVID Workforce grant to the Alliance, now a nonprofit, to assist schools with pandemic recovery. During distance learning, the mental health therapy, medical care, nutrition services, health education, and parent support delivered in Minnesota's school-based clinics proved SBHCs are a durable part of the health care safety net. As pediatric clinics, family physicians, dental clinics, mental health care centers and more providers struggle to meet the needs among kids, school-based access to care creates ease for families, supports a fractured health care system, and strengthens school-health initiatives.

We welcome the opportunity to provide expertise and advocacy toward the continued growth of this critical part of Minnesota's safety net and pivotal partnership with MDH.

Evidence shows partnership between a local Alliance and a state program office like MDH, and dedicated state funding for new and existing school-based health initiatives, correlates with expansion of care for kids, decreases Medicaid costs and increases school success. Growth has been slow in Minnesota compared to most other states. This is a critical time to change that, particularly in rural areas where one school-based health center can offset care shortages for an entire community. This bill allows school-based health providers to be here for kids as they recover from the pandemic, a time when their needs are critically underserved and increasingly acute.

Care within SBHCs is not a replacement for the allied health professionals in schools such as Licensed School Nurses, School Counselors, and Social Workers. Simply said, their co-existence creates ease for families and optimizes learning. Expanding this to more children is a key lever for reducing disparities in education and health outcomes for children in Minnesota.

Respectfully,

Dr. Meg Cavalier
Executive Director

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St. Paul City School is a nurturing community where students thrive academically and socially in a supportive, empowering environment.