

March 6, 2023

Senator John Hoffman
Chair, Senate Human Services Committee
Room 2109, Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senator Hoffman and Human Service Committee Members:

We, the undersigned education advocacy organizations, strongly support Senator Frenz' SF 1028. This bill will provide reimbursement for all behavioral/mental health services covered under the medical assistance state plan provided by school social workers through Federal Medicaid to eligible students as part of a comprehensive Special Education Evaluation and Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). School social workers are already providing mental or behavioral health services and will continue to provide these services as required under federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This bill is slated to be heard on Monday, March 6, in the Senate Human Services Committee.

SF1028 recognizes that school social workers are qualified licensed mental health professionals and practitioners providing Federal Medicaid eligible behavioral and mental health services. Accessing Federal Medicaid funds is a sustainable revenue source that helps maintain staffing and builds school capacity to provide these medically necessary behavioral health services. Schools are federally mandated to complete a comprehensive evaluation and all due process related criteria to identify a student with a disability, along with meeting the medical need for the behavioral health or mental health services under IDEA. Currently, in Minnesota, the only way to access these Federal Medicaid funds is through the Children's Therapeutic Services and Supports (CTSS) benefit. Instead, this bill honors the National Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) and the U.S. Department of Education recommendations to ease administrative burdens on districts to seek Federal Medicaid reimbursement for related services provided on an IEP/IFSP such as CTSS. This bill will allow for reimbursement of services provided by appropriately licensed professionals and practitioners under statute 256B.0625. subd. 26 without the requirement of CTSS. School Social Work services are provided on an Individual Education Plan as determined by a Special Education Evaluation. Thus, eligibility, medical necessity, diagnostic assessment criteria requirements and all other service requirements for Federal Medicaid Reimbursement are satisfied by the IDEA criteria requirements for students with disabilities. In addition, the duplicative paperwork burden necessary to successfully secure this funding has resulted in only 6 school districts participating in the CTSS framework. As a result, school districts estimate that Minnesota has not accessed at least \$10 million in Federal revenue it could receive for the services that school social workers provide determined by a Special Education Evaluation and IEP or IFSP.

Minnesota has a special education funding crisis with districts diverting an estimated \$750 million from their general funds to pay for unreimbursed special education costs in the upcoming fiscal year. While \$10 million does not greatly reduce this cross-subsidy, any movement toward lowering this amount eases Minnesota's obligation and should be embraced.

SF 1028 ensures that the affected students' mental health needs will be addressed in the manner prescribed by the IEP or IFSP, which are developed in consultation with their families. In addition to honoring family voices, it recognizes the value and specialized expertise Minnesota's social workers who are properly licensed as mental health professionals or practitioners have in addressing student mental health needs.

We urge the Senate Human Services Committee to pass this legislation.

Sincerely,

Association of Metropolitan School Districts
Autism Society of Minnesota
Coalition of Licensed Social Workers
Minneapolis Public Schools
Minnesota Administrators for Special Education
Minnesota Association of School Administrators
Minnesota Intermediate School Districts
Minnesota Rural Education Association
Minnesota School Boards Association
Minnesota School Social Work Association
Minnesota Service Cooperatives
Multicultural Autism Action Network
National Association of Social Workers, MN Chapter
St. Paul Public Schools
Schools for Equity in Education
The ARC Minnesota

