

Senator John Hoffman
Chair, Human Services Committee
Minnesota Senate

March 6, 2023

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee,

As Humphrey Policy Fellows at the University of Minnesota Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, we are writing to express our support before your committee for SF 1028, which would ensure that Minnesota school districts are reimbursed for mental health services provided to students by qualified, licensed professionals in their schools. The critical issues addressed in SF 1028 are the focus of our 2022-23 Fellowship group project.

The strong link between education, health and mental health is undeniable. Simply put, students can learn and thrive when their needs are met. Their needs can be met - without them having to wait, travel, or be billed - by the trusted practitioners already available in their own schools. Thousands of Minnesota families rely on school-based services to make sure their children are emotionally, physically and cognitively ready to learn. Of the behavioral supports that children receive, 80% are provided in schools.

SF 1028 ensures appropriate reimbursement to school districts across the state for the high quality services they provide which play a critical role in the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Minnesota's children.

While federal law requires that schools provide the services called for in Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Individualized Family Support Plans (IFSPs), and state law requires schools to seek insurance reimbursement for services, the services provided by school social workers have been left out.

SF 1028 will address this gap and ensure that schools maximize Federal Medicaid resources. If passed, this change would bring in an estimated \$10M in sustainable and untapped Federal funding. Additionally, at no cost to the state, this policy change represents an enormous step toward closing the cross-subsidy for special education services.

As reported by Minnesota Public Radio last year, nearly one third of Minnesota students reported they struggle with long-term mental health problems. Rates of depression and anxiety have skyrocketed, and with a shortage of community-based mental health professionals, schools represent a much needed resource to provide students with desperately needed help.

We are calling on the legislature to support this common-sense policy change that will have a real and substantial impact on the resources schools have with which to support students.

We believe every child requires *and* deserves the services that will help prepare them for learning today and into the future.

Sincerely,

Joanne Brockington
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Marta Swanson
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University of Minnesota Humphrey Policy Fellows