

1919 University Avenue West, Suite 400, St. Paul, MN 55114 Tel. 651-645-2948 or 888-NAMIHELPS www.namimn.org

March 19, 2023

Members of the Jobs and Economic Development Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, we are writing in support of SF 1779. This bill is the Mental Health Legislative Network's (MHLN) employment proposal. The MHLN is a coalition of over 40 mental health organizations including professionals, providers, and advocates. NAMI Minnesota co-chairs the network with Mental Health Minnesota.

For many people with mental illnesses, employment is a critical part of their recovery. The consistency, skill building, and connection to community that many jobs provide can greatly help people manage their symptoms and lead fulfilling lives. However, people with mental illnesses encounter many barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment. For some people a history of hospitalization or legal system involvement makes it difficult to find a job. For others, ongoing management of symptoms creates difficulty in maintaining a job. Yet, about 1 in 4 adults in the U.S. will experience a mental illness every year. About 1 in 25 will experience a serious mental illness. We know that people with mental illnesses are our family members, our neighbors, and our co-workers. Discrimination often keeps people from sharing their struggles even though they are so common.

In advocating for people with mental illnesses, we often draw comparisons to physical health. Many employers understand the accommodations needed for someone who uses a wheelchair or has hearing loss. Yet, the same is often not true for people who live with anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. This is why all people with mental illnesses need to access support through the workforce centers to learn about accommodations or how to explain gaps on their resume.

The funding in this bill will maintain and expand our state's very successful Individual Place and Support programs (IPS). These programs provide individualized job supports with integrated mental health services for people with serious mental illnesses to find jobs rapidly and maintain employment. The bill also creates a task force within the Department of Employment and Economic Development to engage people with mental illnesses and advocates to identify and address barriers to employment.

There is no doubt we need more workers in nearly every industry right now. This bill not only bolsters our workforce but it promotes long term stability and wellness for the many people living with mental illnesses in our communities. Please support SF 1779.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

Elliot Butay
Senior Policy Coordinator