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March 28, 2023

Dear Members of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee:

We are writing to share our comments on SF 2909, the judiciary and public safety omnibus bill. We are grateful for the inclusion of the Mental Health Legislative Network's bill, SF 1921. However, we would urge the committee to consider providing funding for reentry coordination programs. The language in SF 1921 includes an appropriation and as the testifiers in your committee noted on Friday, many of these types of programs exist, but they do not have sustainable funding streams for staff or to meet the needs of the incarcerated people they serve. These funds are intended to build capacity or establish new programs, and provide for some of the material needs of people leaving jail. Providing tangible support through medications, covering fees for IDs and birth certificates, or even a bus ticket, food, or shoes on a winter day, can have a direct impact on whether or not people return to the same jail the very next week after release. We ask you to consider providing funding for these important programs which can save money down the road by avoiding more intensive levels of care, repeat crimes, and compounding court, prison, and supervision costs.

We would also like to draw your attention to Article 1, Section 24 which provides crisis response and criminal investigation grants. We want to ensure that these investments are building our mental health system, and that the funds go to providing the highest quality services. We are concerned that some co-responder models do not have sufficient privacy protections that follow HIPAA, they do not require credentials or training for crisis responders, and they cause confusion for the community when they are seeking help. We want to build on our existing mobile crisis teams which can provide a non-police response to people in crisis, *or* co-respond when necessary. The language as it is in SF 2909 essentially requires a police response when that may not always be necessary. The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) International agree. If a non-police response is possible, it is the best practice. We hope you will consider amending this language to keep building our mental health system.

We are happy to support many of the other provisions in this bill including funding for treatment courts, Youth Intervention Programs, first responder wellness, and support for incarcerated people. We strongly support the family support and staff wellness units in the Department of Corrections budget, as well as funding to make all phone and video calls free from prison. We strongly support the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act and ongoing funding for the State Competency Restoration Board which will begin its critical work very soon. Thank you for listening to our concerns and for your work this session in this committee. This bill does much to take a more transformative approach to justice and make many positive changes for people with mental illnesses.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

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