



Minnesota Department of Human Services
Elmer L. Andersen Building
Commissioner Jodi Harpstead
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April 29, 2024

Dear Chair Marty and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for your efforts this session to improve the lives of children and families, and all Minnesotans who need the support of our state's health and human services system.

I am very pleased that the proposed supplemental budget bill (SF 4699) builds on the historic and generational investments in Minnesota's human services system, and even though we are in a non-budget session, takes important and critical steps forward that will improve people's lives.

I am especially grateful for the inclusion of several of the governor's key supplemental budget priorities, including:

- Additional funding for one of the governor's highest priorities – the new **Department of Children, Youth, and Families**. This investment will help ensure that the new agency has the resources it needs to succeed as it gets up and running.
- Beginning to modernize the **Social Services Information System (SSIS)**. This will help us begin to ease the administrative burden on frontline child welfare workers and allow them to spend more time on what truly matters – serving vulnerable children and their families.
- The administrative and information technology infrastructure needed to implement **Summer EBT** beginning in Summer 2024. This new USDA program is expected to provide approximately \$50 million in federally funded grocery-buying benefits each year for over 400,000 low-income students and their families.
- Additional funding for **Food Banks and Tribal food security** – funding that will help bridge the gap in food support now that programs like E-SNAP have ended and high grocery prices continue to strain family budgets.
- Funding for a tiered **weighted risk system for licensed child care**, which will result in greater consistency among child care licensors and their reviews of child care programs.
- Conforming with federal law changes that make federally funded **Medical Assistance (MA) and MinnesotaCare** available to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) recipients, alongside other lawfully present immigrants.

We also greatly appreciate the inclusion of the department's recommended technical fixes as well as the policy proposals that are relevant to the Health and Human Services Finance and Policy Committee.

We are very pleased to see the investments to improve **Minnesota's mental health system** which will position us well to take action to address these critical needs in future budget sessions.

The department shares the Senate's grave concerns about **disparities in our child welfare system**, including disparities for African American, American Indian, and Latino/Hispanic children, as well as children who live in poverty and children with disabilities. I anticipate that we will have technical assistance for the committee and author to consider and look forward to working together to ensure that these provisions can be implemented.

Thank you for including updates to the **Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act**. The Tribal workgroup that provided this language put forward significant effort into engaging counties, county attorneys, other community advocates and the department to bring forward important changes.

As this bill continues to make its way through the legislative process, we hope you will reconsider a few of the Governor's priorities that either didn't make it into the bill or could use additional attention, including:

- Providing the full \$15 million recommended by the governor to improve **SSIS**;
- Providing funding to food shelves through the **Minnesota Food Shelf Program**, in addition to your investments for food banks and Tribal food programs; and
- Ensuring compliance with recent federal changes to the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Title IV-E**.

Our team will continue to analyze the bill and provide additional feedback and technical assistance as we dig into the details.

Thank you again for your work to improve the lives of the Minnesotans we serve. I look forward to further discussion as the end of session approaches.

Sincerely,



Jodi Harpstead
Commissioner