



May 2, 2024

Senate State and Local Government and Veterans Committee

WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUPPORTING PROVISIONS IN SF4570 FROM NICOLE HELLAND, SOCIAL WORK MANAGER AT CHILDREN'S MINNESOTA

Chair Liebling and Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony to express Children's Minnesota's support for the provisions in SF4570 that remove barriers to hiring qualified social workers that represent the communities we serve.

Children's Minnesota is the state's largest pediatric healthcare system, serving an incredibly diverse patient population. We employ more than 5,000 people, including nearly 90 clinical social workers supporting our emergency departments, medical units, Inpatient Mental Health, Partial Hospitalization, pediatric clinics and outpatient therapy teams. These clinical social workers are dedicated to ensuring that Minnesota children can get the care they need in an environment where they feel seen and included. An essential part of creating this environment is recruiting and retaining staff that reflect the communities our patients and their families identify with. Currently, one quarter of Children's Minnesota employees are people of color, and our goal is to increase that to 34% in 2024.

Right now, we have 15 open positions seeking LGSW or LICSW candidates and current provisional license eligibility requirements, as well as demonstrated bias within the ASWB exam, continue to limit our ability to recruit internal and external candidates. In recent years, we have offered positions to internal candidates who identify as people of color and have demonstrated many years of dedicated employment at Children's, one as a unit coordinator and another as a nursing assistant. They completed the educational requirements and internship hours to join our social work team but have been unable to pass the ASWB exam despite taking it multiple times. These women include those that represent underserved populations and have multilingual skills that would greatly improve our patient care experience and enhance our care team. They were ready and willing to help in addressing the need for additional clinical providers for acute mental health including difficult to fill evening and night shifts, but we have been unable to hire them.

As a teaching hospital, we have a strong social work internship program, and we know that hiring clinical interns following their placement is the optimal way to support workforce stability. I recently learned that one of our interns did not pass their ASWB exam, preventing them from being hired into one of our critical open roles upon graduation.

Barriers like these have also threatened our ability to retain employees and offer opportunities for advancement and leadership, which is key to creating a truly equitable work environment. Recently we celebrated an employee passing the ASWB exam to obtain her independent clinical license. Then the employee, who also identifies as a person of color, shared with me that it was the fourth time she had

taken the exam which meant she had to bear the burden of multiple exam fees, promotional delay and lost income.

The burden of the exam, both emotional and financial, has prevented too many qualified social workers from beginning or advancing the careers they have trained for and it has impacted our ability to effectively and efficiently serve our community. To address the health care workforce shortage we are seeing in Minnesota, more needs to be done to make our systems and processes more equitable. The changes outlined in this bill are the kinds of innovative and necessary changes that need to be made to recruit and retain the workforce that our patient families need, both today and in the future.

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Social Work Manager
Children's Minnesota