

Senator Melissa Wiklund, Chair
Health & Human Finance & Policy Committee
Minnesota State Senate
February 22, 2024

Dear Chair Wiklund and Committee Members

On behalf of Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center, I am sending this letter to support Senator Mohamed's Senate File 3880 – Social Work provisional licensure and modifications.

Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center is a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic that has been a provider of mental health and substance use disorder services in Southeastern Minnesota since 1965. Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center employs a multidisciplinary staff and provides a wide spectrum of mental health and substance use disorder services. This includes social workers who fulfill many critical roles providing direct services to clients, overseeing programs and supervising other clinicians and teams within our centers and clinics. We are working to build our programs to respond to as many needs of our clients and communities as we can. In this current workforce crisis and sparsely invested mental health and SUD environment, our clinics and centers are struggling to sustain services and programs. We are also striving to evolve our staffing models and bring more professionals who represent our diverse communities into our industry.

From experience, we have long held the position that the national licensing exam creates an artificial barrier to licensure, and practice, for many otherwise qualified individuals. We also hold the position that the national exam does not always accurately reflect one's competency or skill. We also know national data shows the passing rate of the national licensing exam is biased against individuals of color and diverse ethnic backgrounds. This all adds to the struggle to keep access to quality care available for our communities.

Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center supports the proposals in S.F. 3880 striving to:

- Expand the existing non-exam route (provisional licenses) eligibility to include all social work graduates
- Eliminate exam requirements for non-clinical licenses (LSW, LGSW, LISW)
- Maintain optional exams for those seeking it; in particular, multi-state and clinical license applicants

We also support maintaining the supervision requirements in currently in statute. We believe increasing these requirements will add barriers for providers and licensees, resulting in further strain on access to our services and industry.

We thank this Committee and rest of the legislature for the good work you have done over these several years in moving our mental health and SUD system forward. We are hopeful this bill is the next step in that good work to build a behavioral health system that can respond with the changing needs of our industry and our communities.

Thank you for your leadership and support.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erik Sievers', with a stylized, flowing script.

Erik Sievers, Executive Director
Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center