



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

Dear Chair Wiklund and Committee Members:

On behalf of Washburn Center for Children, I am writing to support Senator Mohamed's Senate File 3880 – Social Work provisional licensure and modifications.

As you hold a committee meeting and consider [SF 3880](#) this Thursday, we urge that you consider where children in our state are today. Their mental health is our mission: to nurture every child and family's well-being and full potential through transformative children's mental health care.

The mental health care kids receive at Washburn Center is a safety-net. Community-based mental health care is for all kids and families who need us, period. We offer services in community, schools, homes and clinics across the entire Twin Cities region.

Even as I write this today, we have hundreds of kids waiting for services at Washburn Center with more caregivers calling each day. It is not inconceivable that a family may be waiting for up to 9 months to start services.

The workforce is a significant barrier to serving more kids and families.

Washburn Center for Children employs a multidisciplinary staff and provides a continuum of care for children's mental health. 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.

Every kid we serve -- nearly 4,000 -- is navigating mental health challenges that outpaces what we imagined for this generation—any generation.

Children are experiencing more overlapping diagnosis and needing extended treatment plans as we emerge from the pandemic and its disruption to children's lives, connections and stability.

Before the pandemic, the steep increase and ever-growing complex demand of this crisis threatened the future generation and has only intensified. The reality is there will be more kids and families than we can serve in the foreseeable future.

We are working to build our programs to respond to as many needs of our clients and communities as we can. Yet, it's not just at Washburn Center, there's not one area of the sector that is prepared to match the demand.

This current workforce crisis and long-standing trend of underinvestment in mental health means clinics and centers are struggling to sustain services and programs. Meanwhile, we are innovating and evolving staffing models and searching for ways to bring in more professionals who represent our diverse communities.



More than 50% of the kids and families we serve identify as BIPOC. Yet, representation of identities continues to be a major challenge for the mental health care profession, which is narrow in talent availability, high in demand.

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.

Washburn Center for Children 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 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 the entire legislature for your work 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.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Craig F. Warren". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Craig F. Warren
Chief Executive Officer
Washburn Center for Children