



March 13, 2024

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUPPORTING SF3989 FROM STEPHEN DELONG, SOCIAL WORK LEAD
AT CHILDREN'S MINNESOTA**

Chair Wiklund and Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony to express Children's Minnesota's support for SF3989, a bill that would reduce barriers for children currently stuck in our hospitals waiting to access community-based services and residential facilities.

I have been working in mental health for more than twenty years and have spent five of those years at Children's Minnesota. The sheer volume of patients boarding at our hospitals awaiting placement over the past two years is unlike anything I've seen since I started in my current role. Each day I work with members of my team to help these patients access the level of care they need and too often process barriers get in the way.

One of the biggest barriers we face in finding placement for these patients is getting MnCHOICES assessments completed. We rely on our county partners to complete these assessments, but have found that, too often, there is confusion over which county can complete an assessment for a specific patient or we find ourselves wanting to have an assessment completed in order to best assess placement options, while our partners want to wait to complete the assessment until placement is found. The inefficiencies in this process result in the same conclusion – more children waiting in the hospital to access the support they need. For one sixteen-year-old patient this meant waiting in the hospital for nearly 4 months. For one twelve-year-old patient this meant waiting in the hospital for 5 months. Living in the hospital for months on end can have increasingly negative impacts on a child's mental health. These kids deserve better.

The changes to the MnCHOICES assessment process outlined in this bill would go a long way to address the barriers we are facing. Expanding who can be a MnCHOICES assessor, extending the time needed before having to complete a new assessment, and prioritizing assessments for children stuck in the hospital *will* make a difference in the lives of the children we serve.

I ask that you support this bill so that this issue can be addressed during the current legislative session. These children have waited long enough.

Stephen DeLong
Social Work Lead
Children's Minnesota