



March 11, 2024

SENATOR MELISSA WIKLUND, CHAIR

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINNESOTA STATE SENATE

Dear Chair Wiklund and Committee Members

On behalf of Woodland Centers, I am sending this letter to support **Senator Bolden's Senate File 3552–ACT Policy Bill**.

Woodland Centers is a private non-profit 501(c)(3) comprehensive community mental health center established in 1958. We serve seven rural counties in the west central region of Minnesota – Chippewa, Big Stone, Kandiyohi, Lac Qui Parle, Meeker, Renville, and Swift. Woodland Centers catchment area encompasses approximately 5000 square miles with a population of approximately 114,000. Woodland Centers serves approximately 5,000 unduplicated individuals each year ranging in age from toddlers to the elderly.

Woodland Centers provides a spectrum of mental health and substance use disorder services to our communities as a “one stop shop,” including care in assertive community treatment (ACT) services. We have been providing ACT services since the inception of ACT in MN and we added a second ACT Team in August of 2020. Our two teams serve 8 rural counties and in 2023 served 71 clients and provided over 7800 direct care services.

Woodland Center's ACT teams have been instrumental in managing the care of our most at risk and high need individuals in our communities. Our ACT team ensures these individuals are medication compliant, have adequate housing and food resources, obtain needed supports and most importantly remain in the community.

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Having a severe and persistent mental illness is no longer a life sentence to a state hospital or inpatient unit – our ACT teams work with these individuals each day to build lives in the community and find supports to sustain these gains long term.

In this current workforce crisis and (state and national) mental health crisis, Woodland Centers is further challenged in keeping access available to ACT services for our communities, spending staff time/energy away from care while trying to comply with prescriptive and sometimes conflicting regulations governing ACT.

Woodland Centers has not had either of our two ACT teams fully staffed for the last two years and we have been constantly in need of a mental health professional on one or both teams. Being able to hire a clinical trainee, someone with a master's degree that needs supervision towards licensure would open up the pool of potential candidates to work on these teams without the concerns about timing for licensure.

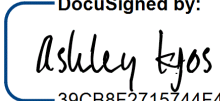
Additionally, freeing up valuable clinical time by not requiring redundant and unnecessary annual assessments reduces the administrative burden for our mental health professionals leaving more time to provide necessary community based services to meet our client's needs.

This legislation proposes changes many ACT providers and partners within the Mental Health Legislative Network hope will help us sustain access to our existing ACT programs across Minnesota for clients.

Acknowledging the good work you and the legislature started last year to update our ACT program in Minnesota, Woodland Centers looks forward to continue working with you, the Department and our other community partners in keeping our ACT program in Minnesota accessible to our communities we are serving.

We are hopeful this bill is the next step in that good work we can do with you all in the legislature to build a mental health regulatory system - overseeing ACT and other services - that can flex/ respond with the changing needs of our industry, and our communities.

Thank you for your leadership and support.

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Ashley Kjos, Psy.D., L.P.

Chief Executive Officer

Woodland Centers