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Fernbrook Family Center, Support MH Rates SC0952-2

March 13, 2024

Dear Chair Wicklund and Health and Human Services Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of Fernbrook Family Center as a request that you support fixing Medicaid mental health rates for outpatient and community based care. This funding is essential for mental health agencies like us to continue to provide crucial mental health services to individuals in our service area.

The shortage of mental health staff is putting people in grave danger. Waiting lists in many of our service areas are so long that it could take a year or more for someone to access mental health services. This is even worse in rural locations in SE MN. While a client waits for services they often experience more frequent suicide attempts, they stop attending school or work, they resort to violence to manage their emotions, they are more likely to engage in criminal activity, they are more likely to turn to drugs and alcohol to cope, they are more likely to engage in unsafe behaviors that put them at risk for being victims of sex abuse or trafficking.

We have more than 50 open positions. If we could hire these 50 staff we could immediately serve an additional 750-1500 clients. The reimbursement rates for these services is prohibitive and is causing people to leave the field rather than enter it. These services work. We have seen truant children return to school and graduate. We have seen caregivers be able to return to work because their children were able to go to daycare and school. We have seen clients go from 3-4 hospital or emergency department visits per month to 0.

The mental health crisis facing individuals in MN is going to have long standing repercussions if something isn't done soon to give relief. The financial impact of this is something that will take years to recover from. Every child that gets turned away from services due to waiting lists is likely to cost tax payers exponentially more money as they get older. Every adult that is not able to access services is costing taxpayers large amounts of money in disability benefits, welfare benefits, housing support, unemployment, etc. The emotional impact is not something we should or could attempt to put a price tag on, but is also something that will take years to recover from and many of these families will never be the same as a result of the trauma they have endured from simply not having their basic need of emotional safety and security met.

Thank you!

Shannon Brown, MS, LPCC

Chief Executive Officer

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