

Senator Melissa Wiklund, Chair  
Senate Health and Human Services Committee  
MN State Senate

March 14, 2024

Dear Chair Wiklund and Committee Members,

On behalf of Ramsey County Social Services Department, I am sending this letter to share the importance of investing in our Minnesota's Medicaid (Medical Assistance) rates for our mental health and substance use disorder services. **We ask the Committee and the Legislature to fix our behavioral health Medical Assistance rates by supporting Chair Wiklund's bill (sc0952-2).**

Ramsey County seeks to be a partner with providers who open services within our borders, and we hope for the opportunity to do so with Chair Wiklund's bill (sc0952-2) as we share our vision of community engagement and partnership to ensure that we are providing services to those with the most unmet needs.

We continue to experience a more severe mental health and SUD care access crisis coming out of the global pandemic than ever before. At the root of this crisis is the lack of **sustainable reimbursement funding** for our mental health and SUD care sector. Costs of delivering care and sustaining staff salaries, benefits, facilities infrastructure, and meeting state regulations have increased exponentially. But, Medicaid (Medical Assistance) reimbursements – the core source of funding for our MN mental health and SUD treatment system – are not keeping pace. Subd. 5. Rate requirements. (a) The commissioner shall establish rates consistent with 1.14 the requirements of section 254B.12 for substance use disorder services and service 1.15 enhancements funded under this chapter.

Out of necessity, our community providers are closing programs or significantly decreasing size their services in efforts to keep some base level of access to services we can be available to our clients. This is resulting in increasingly long waiting lists and longer periods of time clients are kept waiting for care.

25 percent of the counseling staff are licensed mental health professionals under section 245I.04, subdivision 2, or are students or licensing candidates under the supervision of a licensed alcohol and drug counselor supervisor and mental health professional under section 245I.04, subdivision 2, except that no more than 50 percent of the mental health staff may be students or licensing candidates with time documented to be directly related to provisions of co-occurring services; (iii) clients scoring positive on a standardized mental health screen receive a mental health diagnostic assessment within ten days of admission; (iv) the program has standards for multidisciplinary case review that include a monthly review for each client that, at a minimum, includes a licensed mental health professional and licensed alcohol and drug counselor, and their involvement in the review is documented; (v) family education is offered that addresses mental health and substance use disorder and the interaction between the two; and (vi) co-occurring counseling staff shall receive eight hours of co-occurring disorder training annually.

Community mental health providers and programs are striving to keep up with the heightened need for mental health and SUD care, while being reflective and highly responsive to the individuals, families, and communities we serve across the state. This work comes with many rewards and challenges. We have been working with the Legislature and the Department of Human Services (DHS) over the course of many bills and rates studies, most recently throughout last calendar year 2023.

We deeply appreciate your passage of three (3) percent increase with an annual inflation adjustor last year. We are happy to learn the rates study that predicated this change is complete, and we are ready to support moving recommendations for investing in our rates structures to sustain our clients' access to critical mental health and SUD services.

We understand the current financial environment, and we know the full bill cannot be implemented all at once. We implore the legislature to help us start building a solution this year so we can scale up and phase in the full solution for our rates over the next several years.

Please help us move these recommended investments forward - this is foundational to solving our mental health and SUD crisis in Minnesota.

Sincerely,



**Sophia Thompson**

Social Services Deputy Director

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