

Senator Melissa Wiklund, Chair
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
MN State Senate
March 13, 2024

Dear Chair Wiklund and Committee Members

On behalf of Washburn Center for Children, 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).**

Washburn Center for Children leads Minnesota in child-centered mental health care with a broad and deep spectrum of outpatient services across the continuum of 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. As an agency, Washburn is balancing community needs that are not going anywhere, financial sustainability and taking care of our staff so they develop and grow – sustaining this mission for this generation of children and those to come.

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.

Out of necessity, our community providers are closing programs or significantly decreasing the size of their services in efforts to keep some base level of access to services we can available to our clients. This is resulting in increasingly long waiting lists and longer periods of time clients are kept waiting for care. Washburn has about 950 kids on our waitlist right now - so much bigger that it has ever been. Wait times vary by program and can be 6 months or longer. Six months, when you're a kid dealing with some really intense stuff, is an eternity.

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,



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