

This letter is to the Senate Health and Human Services in support of the bill SF 4170.

I have been teaching at Circulo de Amigos Childcare Center for the past six years now. In these six years, I have met hundreds of children; all beautiful, bright and unique in their own way. As you can imagine, six years is more than enough time to experience so many memories and wave of emotions.

Two years ago, I had the most challenging time in my teaching career thus far. I had a four year-old little girl in my classroom whom I have known since she was about four months old and her mom had just passed away suddenly. Four years old. Four years old, her father wasn't in the picture and now was left without her mother. This four year old little girl was now left with her grandma and her teachers to guide and support her. They say, "it takes a village" and though I may be a bit biased, this little girl had the best village supporting her.

All the teachers at our center knew her mother well and we all grieved with her. However, her days were long and full of sadness, anger and confusion. There were days where she would yell and cry for hours, asking for her mother. As her teacher, I felt hopeless and lost. I knew no amount of hugs would fill the emptiness in her heart. There were a lot of times I didn't even know what to say to her.

Thankfully, I work at childcare center who acknowledge the importance of mental health, both with their students and teachers. Our director had reached out to Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health. She found someone to cover my classroom and allowed time for me to talk to someone about what was going, how I felt and gave me lots of support and guidance on how to manage certain situations with this little girl. This program is the reason I am the teacher that I am today.

It is thanks to programs like theirs that our educators, students and families have additional resource to rely on in order to get the help they need. It is crucial to increase funding and access to these programs. Keeping in mind, that there is a teacher shortage and if we take the time to reflect on why there is a teacher shortage. It is in huge part because they and their students aren't benefiting from any mental health resources whatsoever. The solution to this problem is right in front of us, it's just a matter of whether or not you'll take action.

Karen Martinez