



April 9, 2024
Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Chair Wiklund and Committee Members:

On behalf of Children's Minnesota, we are writing in support of SF4664, which provides solutions that are essential to addressing the mental health crisis facing Minnesota children,

Children's Minnesota is the largest pediatric health system in the state serving more than 160,000 kids annually. We provide a continuum of mental health services including primary care, integrated behavioral health, outpatient and partial hospitalization services, crisis stabilization and acute inpatient care.

Despite recent efforts to expand the services we provide, there are still not enough mental health services in Minnesota to meet the current need. Children are waiting for months to access care, too often utilizing the emergency department as a last resort. In 2018 about 1,700 visits to Children's Minnesota emergency departments were for a mental health concern. In 2022 that number increased to 2,500 and in 2023 that number increased even more to 3,300. And, in 2023, over 250 kids collectively spent more than 1,600 days stuck at Children's Minnesota because the appropriate treatment setting was not available to them.

Nearly half of our patients receiving mental health services rely on Medicaid and currently Medicaid rates for mental health services are paid well below the cost of providing care, which is unsustainable. Increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates, as outlined in SF5084 - Wiklund, is *foundational* to increasing access to mental health care. From there we have an opportunity to build out the system we need. Those building blocks are reflected in this bill and include developing a Medical Assistance benefit for Children's Residential Crisis Stabilization and increasing funding for respite grants that directly support families. These two components of the bill, especially, would positively impact the current boarding crisis.

Children and families cannot spend another year waiting for a solution to the mental health crisis they are experiencing. Increasing Medicaid reimbursements rates for mental health services and enacting the critical system changes outlined in this bill are the right next steps for Minnesota. Please support SF4664.

Sincerely,

Amanda Jansen, MPP
Director of Public Policy
Children's Minnesota