

April 4, 2024

Dear Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

Professionals, government leaders, and communities have acknowledged the worsening children's mental health crisis in our state and country. At the same time, we are seeing our treatment capacity in Minnesota shrink. Children are boarding in emergency rooms and being placed on months-long waiting lists. Some with particularly severe symptoms are even sent to juvenile detention or homeless shelters because there are no suitable treatment facilities available to them.

There are many policies that would build up our mental health system. Many of you have authored and voted for some of them. But none of them will be able to reach their full potential without the foundational infrastructure and investments needed to solve the children's mental health crisis.

Half of all chronic mental illnesses begin by age 14. By investing in the building blocks of children's mental health, we can build the continuum that children and families need to access treatment and live their best lives. That's why NAMI Minnesota fully, enthusiastically supports SF 4664, the Mental Health Legislative Network's Children's Mental Health Building Blocks Bill.

Lisa, a NAMI Minnesota member and Executive Director of a special education school, has shared that trying to help children in mental health crises when the highest level of care is unavailable has led to burnout in teachers and social workers. A shortage of beds in both residential care facilities and hospitals has led to her students being discharged from the hospital after one or two nights. They are sent home or back to school with "no step down. There's no figuring it out. They are just left to their own devices."

Everyone at NAMI Minnesota has heard from parents of children with mental illnesses trying desperately to get their child the services they need. These parents call us devastated, furious, and absolutely baffled by the endless "no's" they received looking for help.

According to the 2022 Minnesota Student Survey, 28% of 11th graders in the state had seriously considered suicide. The services that would be expanded and improved by SF 4664 are life-saving. This bill provides you with the opportunity to ensure children can access them. We encourage you to support it. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

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Public Policy Coordinator