



April 18, 2024
Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Dear Chair Wiklund and Committee Members,

On behalf of Children's Minnesota, I am writing to offer comments on several provisions in SF4699, the Senate Health and Human Services Omnibus bill. Children's Minnesota is the state's largest pediatric health care provider. We serve children and teens from all 87 counties and 60 percent of the counties in surrounding states. Nearly half of our patients are insured through Medicaid and because of the diversity of patients we see, we understand the unique and varied challenges Minnesota children face.

Like other hospitals in Minnesota, we have faced tough financial headwinds, workforce challenges and limitations in our ability to support children boarding in our emergency departments waiting to access mental health care. We are grateful to see much needed investments in mental health rates included in this bill alongside important workforce investments and policies that we know will help meet the current need. We also appreciate the ongoing dialogue about the need to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates overall and the continued need to develop strategies to bolster the health care workforce more broadly.

Our comments on additional provisions included in SF4699 are listed below.

Mental health

In addition to the foundational increase in mental health rates, we support key provisions included in this bill that will help address the current boarding crisis.

- The development of a Medical Assistance benefit for Children's Residential Crisis Stabilization
- Increased funding for respite grants that directly support families

We look forward to continuing conversations about where the state can make strategic investments to most effectively address the mental health needs of kids.

Health care workforce

We are supportive of the following provisions that invest in the current and future health care workforce.

- Dedicated loan forgiveness for hospital nurses is an important way the state can help address the workforce challenges we are experiencing.
- Investments in the graduate medical education program are critical to investing in the health care workforce pipeline. At Children's Minnesota we train 70% of the state's future pediatric workforce and additional investments will better equip Minnesota to meet the current need for pediatric providers.

Maternal health and health equity

We are supportive of investments in the work of the Birth Justice Collaborative, including in the development of culturally specific birth centers where Black and American Indian parents can access resources and culturally appropriate care. These kinds of investments are critical to achieving health equity in Minnesota.

Coverage for key medical services

We are supportive of coverage for the following services.

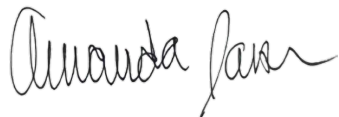
- **Gene therapy.** We need to expand access to this lifesaving care, which is expensive and requires long inpatient hospital stays. We are grateful for this committee's continued work to develop an approach to cover these costs and make it more accessible to those who need it. This bill includes an important first step, and continued conversations are needed to ensure sustainable reimbursement models for new and emerging clinical technologies.

To best support the patients and families we serve, coverage for the following services is also needed, in addition to removing key barriers to care. We hope the committee considers adding the following:

- **Rapid whole genome sequencing access.** Insurance coverage for this service will make this testing more accessible to our patients and ultimately help to more quickly and efficiently identify a diagnosis and path to treatment.
- **Fertility coverage.** At Children's Minnesota we provide fertility preservation counseling to pediatric, adolescent and young adult patients facing cancer. Treatments for cancer are often considered high risk for infertility in the future. Costs are a major barrier for families and often result in fertility preservation being out of reach.
- **Making necessary changes to prior authorization requirements.** In 2023, Children's Minnesota completed over 81,000 prior authorization (PA) requests for nearly 58,000 individual patients. These were children suffering from cancer, heart conditions, asthma and other diseases that needed PA approvals before our clinicians could treat them with the appropriate medications and health care services. Too often the time it takes to complete the PA process threatens to delay patient care leaving families to make a difficult decision to move forward with their child's treatment without knowing if it will be covered by their insurance. After going back and forth with denials and appeals on these cases, over 95% of these requests eventually do get approved. This cumbersome process is not serving our patients and we look forward to working with you to address critical changes that need to be made.

At Children's Minnesota, our vision is to be every family's essential partner in raising healthier children. As the kid experts in our community, we appreciate the opportunity to partner with you to collectively improve the health and wellbeing of kids in our state.

Sincerely,



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