



*Protecting, Maintaining and Improving the Health of All
Minnesotans*

April 17, 2024

The Honorable Melissa H. Wiklund
Chair, Senate HHS Committee
95 University Avenue W.
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 2107
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Finance and Policy Committee,

I am writing to you today to express my appreciation for the inclusion of so many of the Administration's public health priorities in the Senate's Health and Human Services Omnibus bill (SF 4699). I also appreciate the hard work that you, your committees, and your staff have put into creating this bill. I greatly appreciate your efforts and want to highlight MDH priorities included in this bill.

The Department of Health remains grateful for everything included in last year's budget, and this year Governor's supplemental budget requests are centered around adding clarity to our work for the Minnesotans we serve. We wanted to highlight a few of the MDH proposals included in the bill.

988 Telecom Fee

Added in 2023, MDH is requesting to establish the 988 fee at 12 cents to provide certainty to consumers and providers, and to ensure MDH has adequate funding to provide essential services. As you know, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline provides free and confidential phone, text, and chat support for any person who may be experiencing a suicide, mental health, substance use crisis or other emotional distress. It provides lifesaving support to Minnesotans 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year via call, text, and online chat.

Background Studies Reduction

MDH is seeking a reduction to our SGSR appropriation, as licensees regulated by MDH are now responsible for paying fees associated with the preparation of fingerprints, criminal records check consent form, and the criminal background check to the Department of Human Services.

Loan Forgiveness Account Creation

MDH is seeking to establish a dedicated loan forgiveness SGSR account for health professionals. Currently, funds remaining after each biennium are canceled, meaning any awards that are returned may not be re-awarded. This account will allow those funds to be reinvested and more awards granted. In 2023, over 350 eligible health professionals applied for slightly more than 150 awards.

Clinician Training Expansion Grant Program

Updates to a three-year grant period allowing more flexible spending for grantees due to the different funding needs during the years of their training.

International Medical Graduate (IMG) Program Expansion

This program supports trained physicians as they prepare to get licensed to practice in Minnesota and to enter the U.S. medical system once their permanent status has been determined. It would expand the program to allow international medical graduates, who are granted temporary immigrant status, such as those from Afghanistan and Ukraine, to seek guidance and support for preparing to use their medical background to serve communities in Minnesota and build a career in Minnesota as a licensed health care provider.

Assisted Living and Home Care Licensure Updates

In 2019 the legislature established assisted living licensure laws to set consistent, clear expectations for providers and create more protections for people living in assisted living establishments. Since implementation on August 1, 2021, MDH has continued to engage in a robust stakeholder conversation on how to best operationalize these licensing laws. Through this process, we've identified new needs that require further clarification in statute.

Office of Vital Records Updates

We're proposing to add clarity to the vital records process in Minnesota by ensuring timely birth registration for "safe place" infants, clarifying the definition of "replacement" records, and ensuring fathers registered with the Minnesota Father's Adoption Registry (MFAR). This allows fathers to search MFAR without needing to obtain a court order.

Thank you to Chair Wiklund and the Health and Human Services Committee for your efforts in creating this bill and the endless support you and your committee have provided the agency over the last few years. We look forward to further discussions with you over the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brooke A. G" followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Brooke Cunningham, MD, PhD
Commissioner of Health