



Testimonial for Legislative Committee

Subject: Support for Proposed Bill to Expand Allowable Uses of Student Support Personnel Aid

Dear Members of the Legislative Committee,

My name is Danielle Brandt and I am a licensed school nurse in southwest Minnesota. On behalf of the School Health Services staff at Southwest West Central Service Cooperative (SWWC), I am writing to express strong support for the proposed bill to amend Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.901, subdivision 4, regarding student support personnel aid. This bill offers significant improvements by enhancing the resources available to schools and districts for student support services. By expanding the allowable uses of this aid, it will have a much greater positive impact on the academic and mental health well-being of students across Minnesota.

By allowing cooperatives and districts to use funds to hire additional personnel or maintain existing positions, the bill will help ensure that students receive additional support to succeed both academically and socially. This is particularly crucial given the increasing challenges students face, from mental health struggles to academic gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Combined with the expanded ability to use funding for mileage and technology resources, this grant's reach will be far greater whereas, before, these were significant stumbling blocks.

As a licensed school nurse through the Southwest West Central Service Cooperative, I have the privilege and ability to provide a wide array of health services. As we all know, Minnesota does not mandate the presence of a school nurse in schools with less than 1000 pupils. While I pray this someday will change, we are not there yet. The Student Support Personnel Aid funds expand the reach that any level of school health services staff can currently offer. Essentially, this expansion will allow us to be able to do more than "put out fires" and move into broader territory- addressing the complexity of chronic health issues, attendance concerns, special education nursing opportunities, education of students and staff on key topics like the opioid epidemic and cardiac arrest and on and on. Living in a very rural area, mileage is a huge factor. Without the provision of coverage for mileage services, the ability to use these funds was severely limited. Especially, since on any given month, I can accrue over a thousand miles providing site visits and direct services.

In summary, this revised bill provides school districts and education cooperatives with the tools necessary to build a robust system of support that can better address the diverse needs of students, especially in underserved areas. By increasing access to health services, counseling, mental health resources, and other student services, we are taking a proactive step toward improving educational outcomes and fostering a healthier, more supportive school environment.

I strongly urge the legislature to approve the revisions of this important bill, as it will not only improve the overall quality of education but also ensure the well-being of all students in Minnesota. As a service cooperative, SWWC is dedicated to providing essential resources and support to rural school districts. We see this bill as a crucial step toward addressing the diverse and growing needs of rural Minnesota.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and your ongoing commitment to improving education in our state.

Sincerely,

Danielle Brandt | BAN, RN, PHN, Licensed School Nurse

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