



February 25, 2025

Senator Melissa Wiklund
95 University Avenue W.
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 2107
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Senator Wiklund:

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As frontline mental health workers and members of SEIU Healthcare MN & IA, we write to support SF1402 which would provide a long overdue Medicaid rate increase for mental health services. SEIU represents over 50,000 healthcare workers in Minnesota who work in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and self-directed homecare. Our members include hundreds of recently organized mental health workers in both the Allina and M Health Fairview systems. Between us, we have worked in mental health at M Health Fairview Riverside campus for 15 years and live in Minneapolis.

Our fellow mental health workers organized with SEIU because we thought our current mental health system is failing employees, the patients we care for, and our entire community. We suffered from low pay, dangerous working conditions, and short staffing. We wanted to keep providing critical services Minnesotans has continued to need.

Worse, hospitals kept closing and re-shuffling mental health beds in a way that made it very difficult to do our jobs effectively. On top of the closures of St. Joseph's and Southdale, our employer has closed more beds at Riverside. Since the pandemic, our pediatric department closed over 40 inpatient beds at Fairview Riverside. In June 2024, Fairview reduced another 12-adult inpatient mental health beds after capping Station 10 and 32. They have also worsened our staffing grid, instituted hiring freezes and in the fall of 2023 laid off Health Unit Coordinators. While decisions like this have been difficult on our coworkers, the ultimate burden is faced by the patients we serve.

As critical as our union has been of Fairview's decisions, we acknowledge these problems result, to a large extent, from a health care financing system that chronically underfunds mental health. In 2024, other hospitals have made the difficult decision to close mental health beds. Lake Region Hospital in Fergus Falls closed its 14-bed adult unit. Lakewood Hospital in Staples closed its 10-bed adult unit.

Everyone agrees that mental health treatment saves money for the health care system and our community in the long run, but it is hard to get the investments we need now.

SF1402 begins to redress that balance, at least with some Medicaid rates. It is an important first step to create a sustainable mental health system.

Sincerely yours,

Eric Immer and Bill Bader

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