

Behavioral and Mental Health Program

February 25, 2025

RE: Support for SF 1561 – Establishing Grant Programs for Children’s Mental Health

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

On behalf of Volunteers of America of Minnesota, I write in strong support of SF 1561, which establishes critical grant programs to address the urgent crisis of children with mental health and related needs being boarded in hospital emergency departments, detention centers, and county systems across Minnesota. These children—held for safety but without access to the treatment they need—deserve better. SF 1561 provides real solutions that build on proven strategies to stabilize children and families, ensuring they receive the right care at the right time.

As a provider of mental health services that supports nearly 800 young people annually—through outpatient clinics, school-based programs, home and community-based services, and residential treatment—we see firsthand the devastating impact of a system unable to meet the needs of children in crisis. When children are left to "board" without access to treatment, their conditions often worsen, resulting in increased trauma, longer recovery times, and greater strain on families and safety net systems.

This legislation wisely invests in solutions that work, including:

- **Leveraging Decompression Funding** to create individualized solutions for children who are boarding, preventing prolonged stays in inappropriate settings.
- **Establishing a Youth Professional Training System** to build a well-equipped workforce capable of providing specialized care.
- **Sustaining Youth Transition Teams** to ensure children and families receive services designed specifically for their unique needs when transitioning to less restrictive care settings.
- **Expanding High-Fidelity Wraparound and natural, family-driven support** to promote long-term stability and resilience.
- **Creating access to MnCHOICES assessments** to ensure families receive the appropriate supports and services.
- **Providing respite services for families** to prevent caregiver burnout and keep children safely supported at home.

By investing in these critical strategies, we can break the cycle of crisis-driven care and ensure that children with mental health needs receive treatment, not just temporary holding. These programs will not only help children recover and thrive but also strengthen families and reduce the burden on hospitals, law enforcement, and county systems.

We urge you to support SF 1561 and commit to funding sustainable, effective solutions for Minnesota’s children. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue. We stand ready to collaborate and support this work in any way we can.

Sincerely,



Julie Manworren, President & CEO
Volunteers of America of Minnesota