



Senator Melissa Wiklund, Chair
Health and Human Services Committee
April 9, 2024

Chair Wiklund and Health and Human Services Committee Members,

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, MN Chapter (NASW-MN) and the MN Coalition of Licensed Social Workers (Coalition), we are writing in support of several components in SF2669, the Health and Human Services omnibus bill.

NASW-MN is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in our state and the Coalition includes the MN Association of Black Social Workers, the MN Hmong Social Workers' Coalition, the MN Nursing Home Social Workers Association, the MN School Social Workers Association, and the MN Society for Clinical Social Work. Collectively we represent over 3,000 social workers.

Mental Health

Thank you for including an increase in mental health provider rates in your budget proposal. There is a significant gap between the cost of delivering services and reimbursement rates. Addressing this gap will improve access to services, increase capacity in mental health settings, and reduce staffing shortages. We are supportive of the proposed funding mechanism because it is essential to address this need, especially in our community mental health centers relying on MA to sustain their services.

Additionally, we are supportive of extending audio-only telehealth services. Accessing mental health care through the phone is important for those who don't have computer access or reliable internet services. We know that audio telehealth is an effective way to deliver some mental health services and we appreciate that option will continue to be available.

We are also grateful that this bill expands targeted case management services from age 18 to age 21. Maintaining these services is an important link in addressing the mental health needs of our young people as they transition into independence and healthy adulthood.

Furthermore, we appreciate the inclusion of sustainable funding for school-linked mental health grants. We have been concerned about a funding cliff for this service that students and families have come to rely on as an accessible provider and a crucial option within the mental health service continuum.

Finally, we appreciate that this bill updates mental health terminology. "Mental illness" is the term used by professionals and treatment settings. And, clarifying the definition of clinical supervision provides important information to professionals in an often confusing licensing system.

Economic Supports

The money set aside for food and housing support will be important support for our clients in crisis.

Child Protection

We support the inclusion of several components within Articles 17 and 18. Social workers seek policies that support every child growing up in a nurturing and safe environment. We understand that the current systems are complex, underfunded and change seems daunting. Yet, it's for this reason that inclusion of the fiscal analysis of our child welfare system and the scan of our youth programming is particularly important. We must develop a path forward, even in times of declining resources.

Furthermore, social workers envision a trauma-responsive child welfare system that fosters participation, restoration, safety, and resilience. We appreciate that SF 2669 includes a broader definition of kin along with more flexibility for relative caregivers so children have more opportunities to stay with known and supportive adults in their lives.

We appreciate that resources are limited and the needs are great. Thank you for your work in balancing competing priorities in SF2669.

Sincerely,

Coalition of Licensed Social Workers Representatives,

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Renita Wilson, MSW, LICSW, MN Association of Black Social Workers

Kao Nou Moua, PhD, MSW, LGSW, MN Hmong Social Workers' Coalition,

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