

# HENNEPIN COUNTY

## BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

March 26, 2025

**Re: Support for SF2546**

Chair Latz and members of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee,

I am writing today in support of SF2546, which would appropriate funds to the commissioner of corrections for grants to juvenile detention centers to provide mental health services for incarcerated youth.

The Hennepin County Juvenile Detention Center serves Minnesota's largest city and the 45 surrounding communities. The residents in our care are youth who are both high-risk and high-need, and many of them are facing significant legal consequences for their alleged actions in the community.

Many of our residents are also struggling to manage feelings and behaviors stemming from mental health issues. Some have cognitive or developmental delays or disabilities. Others have issues related to their own experiences with abuse, trauma, poverty, violence and loss. Diagnoses such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, attachment disorders, personality disorders, 'conduct disorders,' and bipolar are common. In addition, many use illegal substances.

Some of the youth in care are released after a few hours or days, while others may spend months or more in custody. Some youth are not deemed competent to participate in their proceedings. The uncertainty for these youth as it relates to how their case will resolve and where they may go next generates significant anxiety. This can heighten their mental health difficulties and lead to aggressive behaviors towards others or injurious behavior towards self.

SF2546 seeks to provide detention centers and treatment facilities with additional funding to support the mental health needs of their residents. SF2546 will allow all facilities in the state to receive funding for mental health support services that is proportional to the number of youth served.

Correctional officers, while trained in many topics, are not mental health professionals. It is often youth with the most severe behaviors who languish in a detention center because there is no other placement who can take them or manage their behavior. It is imperative that we provide support for residents' mental health while they are in our custody. Funding from SF 2546 will allow each facility to make the best decision for them as to what mental health staff or resources are needed to meet the unique needs of their population.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Irene Fernando