



March 25, 2025

Legal Aid/Minnesota Disability Law Center Support for SF 2546

Dear Chair Latz, Ranking Minority Member Limmer, and Members of the Judiciary and Public Safety Committee:

Legal Aid and the Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony and support for SF 2546. Legal Aid represents clients in poverty, clients who are 60 and older, and clients with disabilities free of charge. We represent most clients with disabilities through MDLC, which is also the federally designated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) agency for people with disabilities in Minnesota. As the P&A agency, MDLC conducts monitoring site visits to facilities serving people with disabilities to ensure they are free from abuse and neglect.

Youth in the juvenile justice system have mental health disorders at disproportionately high rates compared to their peers. According to AIM Youth Mental Health, approximately 70% of youth in detention have one or more mental health diagnoses, far exceeding the general population.

Since 2022, MDLC has completed more than 14 monitoring site visits at juvenile detention sites across the state. During these visits, MDLC focused its site reviews on mental health care services, restraint and seclusion, and delays to discharge, among others. After extensive interviews with facility staff, administration, and youth during each visit, MDLC found that all sites required additional dedicated mental health staff to meet the needs of youth in detention. MDLC also found that youth with mental health diagnoses, particularly those who were incompetent to stand trial, faced significant barriers to discharge to less restrictive settings. The result-- youth with mental health disabilities often spent more time in detention and had limited access to mental health care. The funding provided in SF2546 will help address these concerns and improve the mental health care offered to youth in juvenile detention. We urge you to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Purington
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Minnesota Disability Law Center

Ellen Smart
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