

March 24, 2025

Members of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, we are writing in support of SF 2546, the Mental Health Legislative Network's juvenile justice bill. Upwards of 75% of children in the United States' juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental illness. We know that when mental illnesses go untreated, the criminal justice system can be the last stop. Research is clear that any time spent in the juvenile delinquency system opens a child's future to negative outcomes academically, socially, physically, and mentally. In fact, the very separation of families from children entering detention settings is a traumatic event. With such a prevalence of mental illnesses, you would think there would be adequate mental health treatment when children arrive in detention to mitigate the harmful impacts of incarceration and to address ongoing challenges, however this is not the case in Minnesota.

Many juvenile detention facilities have minimal or patchwork mental health treatment available. Compounding this issue is the children's mental health crisis in our state. As residential capacity has shrunk and private insurance does not cover basic children's mental health services, children with severe symptoms are waiting weeks and months for assessments and treatment, and in the worst cases, boarding in emergency rooms, hotels, and juvenile detention centers. This means some children are in detention solely because the correct treatment setting is not available. SF 2564 provides critical resources to detention centers to hire or contract with mental health professionals to address these acute needs.

It is important to also note that treatment in detention is only one piece of necessary care for children and families. We must continue to build our children's mental health system and that includes providing families with supportive services while transitioning out of detention. High Fidelity Wraparound services are one example of a highly effective and family-driven model to support families using natural supports. We should continue to bolster access to these services, targeted case management, and appropriate settings to treat children with complex needs.

Thank you for hearing this important bill. We urge you to support SF 2546.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

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Senior Policy Coordinator