

March 26, 2025

## **Support for SF 2546 re: Children Boarding in Juvenile Detention Centers**

The Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities (OMHDD) has a statutory mission to promote the highest attainable standards of treatment, competence, efficiency, and justice for adults and children receiving services for mental illness, developmental disabilities, and substance use disorder. We advocate for clients' rights, health, and well-being; monitor service delivery systems; and provide recommendations for systemic improvements. OMHDD wishes to express our strong support for SF 2546.

For years, OMHDD has been advocating for the need for better and more timely access to children's mental health services. Unfortunately, we have seen our children's mental health system fall further and further into crisis. As a result, there has been an increase in children boarding in hospitals because there were no available services, supports, or placements available to meet children's basic safety needs. Troublingly, OMHDD is also aware of the increasing number of children boarding in juvenile detention centers – including those placed in these detention settings not because of any criminal justice concerns, but because there is simply no place else for them to go.

Regardless of how they came to be placed in a juvenile detention center, these are children who need trauma-informed mental health treatment and residential care due to the acuity of their needs – including behaviors with significant safety concerns due to aggression, self-harm, and running from care. They are often children with intellectual and developmental disabilities or related conditions. While staff often admirably do their best to serve these children with complex treatment and support needs, juvenile detention facilities are not equipped or resourced to provide them with the services, supports, and mental health treatment they so desperately need.

SF 2546 would provide much needed funding to bring qualified mental health treatment and services into juvenile detention centers to best support children while in those settings. Wherever Minnesota's children are in care, it is imperative that the treatment and supports to meet their needs are provided to them to avoid compounding the trauma that so many of these children have experienced. OMHDD urges support for SF 2546 as a tangible and important action that can be taken to ensure more equitable access to mental health treatment and services for children in these settings.

Sincerely,



Lisa Harrison-Hadler  
Ombudsman