

March 12, 2023

Dear Members of the Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, we would like to express our support for HF1339. With surging demand for mental health and substance use disorder treatment, Minnesota simply does not have the workforce necessary to provide the care that people need in the community. HF 1339 would allow up to three physicians to participate in an addiction medicine fellowship program through Hennepin Health, providing an important new pathway for people to enter the substance use disorder workforce.

COVID-19 and the stress of social isolation has intensified the need for substance use disorder treatment. A CDC report of adults during the pandemic found that 40.9% of respondents reported at least one adverse mental health or behavioral health problem (including substance use), with another 13.3% of respondents reporting starting or increasing substance use to cope with the stress or emotions of the public health pandemic. In 2021, the CDC reported that 81,000 Americans died by a drug overdose in the 12 months ending in May of 2020. This is the largest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in the United States and speaks to the urgent need to continue building our substance use disorder system.

This fellowship program will prepare physicians to become experts in the prevention, clinical evaluation, and treatment of people with substance use disorders. This includes supporting adolescents with substance use disorders, Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), outpatient therapies, care coordination for pregnant women, as well as supporting people with substance use and a co-occurring mental illness. These fellows will be prepared to serve as leaders in their department or program and support other physicians and clinicians to better meet the needs of people with substance use disorders..

Thank you for your support of people with mental illnesses and substance use disorders. HF 1339 will support a crucial pathway for expanding the substance use disorder workforce.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director

Sam Smith  
Public Policy Coordinator