



March 9, 2021

Education Finance Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
5 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Chair Davnie and Members of the Education Finance Committee:

PACER Center has worked to meet the needs of families of children and youth with mental health needs through our Children's Mental Health and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders project for over 20 years. During that time, calls related to meeting the mental health needs of children and youth has grown not just in numbers, but in complexity. We need to find ways to expand supports for our children and youth in school.

We are in support of House File 945, Representative Youakim's bill. Parents and their children and youth have reported to us that their special education students with mental health needs often rely on their school social workers for support during their school day. PACER's Youth Advisory Board on Mental Health, a group of teens who meet monthly to work on decreasing the stigma related to having mental health needs, recently discussed how important their school social workers were to helping them regulate and stabilize during the school day. Yet school districts have struggled with how to build capacity and fund services to students who need these services to stay in school.

For students receiving special education services, federal Medicaid reimbursements have allowed services like speech/language, occupational and physical therapy and school nurse services to support their access to education. Unfortunately, school social work services which are included under Minnesota statutes as health-related services that can bill MA, are not being allowed. This bill would allow for third party billing for those services.

There have been concerns raised about this bill prohibiting access to school-based Children's Therapeutic Support Services (CTSS) program. While CTSS services can be helpful for youth if the school has them available (most do not) and can provide a seamless transition of support through the summer, this bill does not prohibit Medicaid reimbursement through the CTSS program. This bill is seeking to allow schools to bill Medicaid for health-related services through the IEP/IFSP process in an attempt to provide more support at school.

There have also been concerns raised about this bill seeking to support using the IEP instead of a diagnostic assessment to bill Medical Assistance. While a diagnostic assessment is used to establish a mental health diagnosis and support the medical necessity of needed services, schools use the special education evaluation process to determine a disability and educational needs that arise due to the impact of the disability. For a student to get support for their emotional needs, the current system does not allow that to be reimbursed through third party billing like other students with speech, language, OT, PT or nursing service needs.

It is our experience in working with parents and their children and youth, that mental health services are best provided by trusted professionals. School social workers are those trusted school

professionals who have the training and expertise to offer students with mental health challenges that support within the school setting. Our children deserve access and support for their mental health needs in school.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for House File 945. Please contact Sarah Clarke with any questions at 952.201.4654 or sclarke@hyldenlaw.com.

Sincerely,

Renelle Nelson
Children's Mental Health and EBD Coordinator
PACER Center