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February 22, 2022

TO:

Members of the House Behavioral Health Policy Division  
c/o Chair Peter Fischer

RE:

Support of HF3215

Dear Members of the House,

North Homes Children and Family Services strongly supports bill HF3215. We are a comprehensive mental health services nonprofit, serving greater Minnesota since 1990. Funds made available through HF3215 to improve mental health workforce would provide critical support to our hiring and retention efforts that are needed to maintain services and grow to meet the needs of our communities.

Prior to the pandemic, it was estimated that 20% of children in Minnesota experienced some type of mental health issue each year. Additionally, there was already a crisis in Minnesota regarding available treatment options for some of our most seriously challenged youth, who often end up in hospitals and shelters. Growing referral lists for many of our residential and school-based programs highlight that this need has only increased over the last two years.

The prior shortage of residential treatment facilities for children has been exacerbated as we have had to temporarily close and combine our residential programs due to staffing shortages. To illustrate, our Itaskin Treatment Center and Cottage campus has a 72-bed capacity – but our current staffing capacity can only support 40 youth. Other programs have had to consolidate as well, restricting our ability to provide access to residential treatment for youth in our region and the state of Minnesota. We have also not been able to implement services we have been certified to do, such as Intensive Treatment within our Foster Care program.

Our current operational situation is dire. Particularly direct care staff have voiced concerns of pay, as they worked tirelessly through the pandemic putting themselves and their families at increased risk of exposure. We desperately need more licensed therapists for our programs across our continuum. Additionally, we have noticed fewer applicants for positions across our services.

We urge you to act quickly on HR3215. There are unprecedented mental health needs for

children and families that are going unmet. By taking action and approving HF3215, the legislature would provide agencies like ours with the support and opportunities needed to recruit and retain staff – ultimately allowing us to maintain and grow our capacity for mental health care.

Sincerely,



James Christmas  
CEO, Founder  
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NORTH HOMES  
Children and Family Services