June 15, 2020

Dear Chair Liebling and Members of the Health and Human Service Finance Committee,

Thank you for reviewing the Extension of DHS Waivers at today’s hearing.

Waiver flexibilities granted as part of the Peacetime State of Emergency have been critical to sustain services during the pandemic. Maintaining the ability to deliver services through the modes made possible through waiver flexibilities will be of significant importance into the future as the pandemic continues with a lack of clarity on potential future spikes in the spread of

the virus.

Children’s mental health, residential and foster care services are maintaining connections to therapists, case managers, family and kin while assuring safety for all children, youth, family and staff. As all have adapted to these new ways of connecting, it would be very challenging to having these innovations in service abruptly halted due to the conclusion of Minnesota’s Peacetime State of Emergency.

AspireMN members recently concluded a survey of clients statewide, to better understand client and family experiences with telehealth. The results indicate very positive feedback, including clients and families sharing that:

* 88% stating they “benefited from telehealth”
* 60% reporting they “would choose telehealth as an option after COVID-19”
* 75% sharing “overall, I am satisfied with using telehealth”

In response to “what is not working well” with telehealth we have learned that most dissatisfaction relates to technology needs, unstable internet connection, and for ages four and under there are clear challenges in maintaining the attention of the child.

In response to “what is working well” clients responses reflected:

* *My child feels more comfortable sharing in his own home setting.*
* *Our therapist makes it work!*
* *My child is able still have connection with clinician.*
* *More of session can be focused on our goals with less time spent in transitions*
* *The fact that we get to continue services during this stressful time*
* *I love that our foster child can meet in our home. I’m close by to join but also able to do things at home if I’m not needed. It also worked smooth when my other kids needed to join in a session.*
* *The simple fact that my son can have continuity and continue to see his therapist.*

The value of the waiver authorities cannot be overstated as it relates to sustaining services for Minnesotans in this precarious time. Maintaining the option for telehealth and enhanced flexibilities allows for services to restart in-person as needed (eg: early childhood therapies) while allowing for continued flexibilities where needed.

Thank you for your consideration of this important proposal to allow for continued waiver authorities as we adapt, innovate and maintain services through this challenging pandemic.

Warm regards,

Kirsten Anderson