

March 17, 2023

Dear Representative Liebling and Members of the Health Finance and Policy Committee,

At Volunteers of America of Minnesota (VOA of MN) we are deeply committed to serving children, youth, and families with crucial mental health services in a variety of community-based settings.

Today we are writing in support of **HF346** that would approve a much-needed bridge for Medicaid community-based mental health rates, ahead of the establishment of a future rate structure, currently under design by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Our community-based clinical team has experienced significant staffing challenges, in no small part due to the continued stress on mental health providers in the past three years, as well as our inability to be wage-competitive with the private sector. Although our team has worked diligently to see as many clients as they can manage, we continue to have an average waitlist of about 50 clients, with the potential to serve even more given the increasing demand for school-based mental health services.

We know the impact of what we do can change the trajectory of young lives. One of our school-based therapists has been working with a ten-year old student who would panic and start crying if anyone mentioned reading. In intensive sessions, the student and their therapist practiced physical calming skills, created alternative learning paths, involved their family to incorporate “story time” at home, all to reprocess negative past experiences into meaningful and positive associations. This young student has developed a significantly different relationship with learning and asks for books for their birthday, volunteers to read aloud in class, and even feels comfortable asking for help with vocabulary. The stress that was taking its toll on their family was alleviated with timely intervention and supports the continued wellbeing of the child and their family.

Once again, thank you for your leadership and public service on behalf of children, youth, and families. Please do not hesitate to contact me at Julie.Manworren@voamn.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Julie Manworren
President and CEO