



February 19, 2021

Dear Distinguished Members of the Minnesota Legislature:

Today, I am writing to support growing our mental health workforce by urging you to support the bill that was recently introduced in the House as HF 970 and is now moving through the legislature. This bill acknowledges the need to address the shortage of mental health professionals by developing a more robust workforce development pipelines, and helps pave the way for educational and training programs to enable us to meet the needs of Minnesota by increasing our mental health workforce.

Having spent much of my early career in the public sector in local county government, then in the nonprofit sector as President of Wilder for ten years, and now as founding dean of the Morrison Family College of Health, I have seen and experienced the barriers for those who want to become licensed mental health professionals and the impact of these barriers on the quality of services we are able to provide to our most vulnerable communities. The Morrison Family College of Health trains social workers, counseling psychologists, and those who will eventually enter community, public health, and health professions.

The following would especially make a significant difference and provide sweeping change:

- Including alcohol and drug counselors, who have important roles in our mental health system in the bill
- Requiring insurance plans to cover trainees under supervision, which would increase access and expand care for those who need mental health services
- Requiring regulatory and licensure board composition that include rural, BIPOC, and under-represented group representation
- Requiring Continuing Education Units for mental health professionals to focus on culturally competent care and education
- Including and allowing indigenous healing approaches provided by indigenous providers to indigenous individuals to be billed for insurance
- Resourcing training for BIPOC providers to become trained in supervision and loan forgiveness

We also support the idea of a task force that would convene to examine ways for alternative pathways to licensure, to find ways to eliminate bias, and recommend more culturally responsive care. During this time of crises, health disparities have become even more prevalent and impossible to ignore. We believe that though there are also some new areas such as enabling cross-field supervision which would need to be carefully navigated, this bill provides a comprehensive array of strategies that address building a more informed, and competent mental

health workforce in our state. We support this bill and urge you to support investing in strengthening our mental health system for all Minnesotans by investing in our workforce.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maykaoy. Harg". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Vice President Strategic Initiatives and Founding Dean
Morrison Family College of Health