

Dear Chair Schultz and Committee Members

On behalf of Range Mental Health Center, Inc., I am sending this letter to support Representative Vang's House File 970 - Culturally informed behavioral health training requirements and culturally diverse workforce development support. Range Mental Health Center (RMHC) was the first rural community mental health center in the United States and the first in Minnesota to provide services developed specifically for persons with serious and persistent mental illness. The Center was established in 1961 and was the 16th federally designated community mental health center in the nation, and the first in Minnesota.

Mental health services are provided each year to over 5,000 adults, children, and families. The service area of RMHC covers northern St. Louis County, and expands for more than 6,800 square miles.

RMHC currently employs approximately 200 individuals who provide many services, including:

- Outpatient and psychiatric treatment
- Community support services
- Inpatient and outpatient addiction and detoxification services
- Homeless adult, chronic, and youth programs
- Housing services
- Assertive community treatment team
- Children's community and school-based mental health programs
- 16-bed intensive residential facility
- 8-bed community crisis stabilization unit
- And a mobile crisis team

RMHC also owns the Perpich Apartments, a 27-unit apartment building in Hibbing, Minn., to provide adequate housing units for individuals with severe mental illness and chronic homelessness.

As a community mental (and chemical) health program and safety net provider, Range Mental Health Center Inc. serves clients and communities who would not have access to mental and chemical health care.

Our staff are key/ critical to our ability to provide high quality care to our clients and communities. Our entire behavioral health system is facing a workforce crisis, with more providers retiring than are coming into the field. The shortage is particularly true for our communities of color, whose members face even more barriers to accessing care and inequities. Range Mental Health Center, Inc. supports HF 970's proposal to further diversify our workforce through more diversity training and increased funding/ investment into education and training supports to allow more students and workers from communities of color to enter the mental health workforce.

Most importantly, the bill –

- convenes a workgroup to address barriers in the current professional licensure process and consider an alternative licensure pathway.
- expands the definition of a mental health practitioner to include students completing internships while in their programs (graduate or undergraduate). This way students, particularly non-traditional students with families and children, do not have to choose between completing their degree and making wages to feed their families. This also allows agencies to hire more mental health practitioners, under a wider net of eligibility.

All the proposals in HF 970 are a first step, but an important first step, to bringing more diverse staff candidates into the mental and chemical health fields. Thank you for your consideration and support of the mental health care needs of our diverse communities and our mental health care system in Minnesota. Please support House File 970.

Sincerely,



Jarvis A. Allen MSW, LICSW CEO Range Mental Health Center