



February 12, 2021
House Education Finance Committee


Dear Distinguished Committee Members,

My name is Richard Wolleat, and I am the CEO of Northwood Children's Services in Duluth, Minnesota. Northwood is a private, not-for-profit organization that provides a full continuum of mental health treatment services to children and families from throughout the state of Minnesota. ISD 709 provides educational programming to our clients through two schools co-located on our campuses. Northwood also operates year-round day treatment programs in four ISD 709 schools. We serve approximately 300 children and youth a day in our various programs, which include outpatient, day treatment, early childhood day treatment, diagnostic and assessment, corporate foster care and residential treatment services.

I am writing today to request your support for HF725 and SF782. Many of the students in our mental health treatment programs lag far behind their peers in academic achievement because of the disruptions, trauma and other challenges they have faced in their lives. The Covid pandemic has exacerbated those gaps. It is our experience that the kids make huge strides academically when we are able to provide them with a safe, stable and nurturing environment in our treatment programs. Data gathered and analyzed from a group of students several years ago indicated they made progress at a dramatically accelerated pace.

The financial support from this bill would provide districts the tools they need to offer flexible, extended educational programming for our students. Believe me, the impact would be huge. The most effective educational model we delivered to our kids was a number of years ago when I was able to negotiate an extended- year contract with the district and local educators union. We essentially were able to offer year-round school, and the continuity and consistency of that model were an optimal fit for our students.

I appreciate your time and consideration, and I would be happy to provide any additional information you would find useful.

Respectfully,

Richard J. Wolleat, MSSW, LICSW
President and CEO
Northwood Children's Services

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