



An association of resources and advocacy for children, youth and families

www.aspiremn.org

August 25, 2021

Representative Ryan Winkler, Chair
Senator Karin Housley, Chair
Frontline Worker Pay Working Group
Via electronic submission

Dear Chair Winkler, Chair Housley and Members of the Frontline Worker Pay Working Group,

The leadership of this working group to highlight the commitment, skill and fortitude of Minnesota's frontline workers is deeply appreciated. As we experience the current increase in COVID cases with the accompanying acute staffing crisis throughout our human service continuum, we are again reminded of the critical nature of our frontline workforce. For Minnesota's children's service continuum, frontline staff are fundamental to delivering quality care.

Children with acute mental illness who require residential mental health treatment or day treatment, cannot receive care without the frontline youth workers and mental health practitioners who support their learning, safety, skill building, and daily life activities. Children in foster care rely on loving foster caregivers to support their health, wellbeing, ongoing connection to family of origin, school activities, extra-curricular play, therapies and much more.

Throughout the pandemic, frontline workers in the children's mental health and child welfare continuum were selflessly committed to children facing some of the greatest needs. Without our frontline staff and foster parents, children whose mental illness requires 24/7 treatment and support, and children who were in temporary child welfare stays away from home could have gone without care. Instead, children's service staff choose to show up everyday in the face of personal risk and at a wage that unfortunately is far lower than the value of the work.

Youth workers and mental health practitioners innovated as they transformed service delivery to include all COVID safety protocols. Staff explained masking, googles and other strange PPE to children with significant trauma experiences and related barriers. They helped to normalize new COVID requirements, supported children to feel safe despite constant change, and brought most needed fun, care, and consistent presence.

Staff also cared for COVID positive children in quarantined spaces. They gave comfort, attended to every need, entertained, and helped restore COVID positive children back to health as they also were responsive to children's mental health symptoms. While serving children in quarantine many staff felt unable to return home to risk infecting family members – so found alternative housing to maintain their commitment to caring for children. An inspiring response to adverse circumstances on all sides.

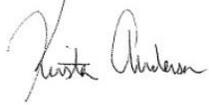
Foster caregivers experienced the pandemic in isolation, without the team established to support children in their home. Caregivers played every role possible for the children in care – playmate, therapist, comforter, teacher, and connector to family, school, and any other virtually-available source of care. They took on great risk as they welcomed new children into their homes, maintained family visits, and were some of the first to reenter in-person engagement – all to better support children in their care.

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Frontline workers had and continue to have a vital role in quality caregiving. We owe them all a debt of gratitude for the courage and unwavering dedication demonstrated during the height of the COVID pandemic. Included in this vital group of frontline staff are our children's mental health and child welfare workforce – these skilled caregivers make a world of difference for children who with mental health treatment, focused services and supports, and caregivers who believe in them, can get better and live their best lives in community.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Krista Anderson".

Executive Director