



February 7, 2022

The Honorable Tina Smith  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Smith:

On behalf of the 43,000 working Minnesotans represented by AFSCME Council 5 and the 13,000 workers represented by AFSCME Council 65, we ask that this letter be part of the record of the February 10 subcommittee hearing on Recruiting, Revitalizing and Diversifying: Examining the Health Care Workforce Shortage.

AFSCME members provide health care and related services across Minnesota. Our members work in skilled nursing care homes like Viewcrest Health Center in Duluth and Boundary Waters Care Center. They work in hospitals like the CentraCare in Paynesville, the Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato, and Windom Area Health and Bigfork Valley Hospital. They work in specialized psychiatric hospitals like the Anoka-Metro Regional Treatment Center, the Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Hospital (CABHH) program in Willmar and the Community Behavioral Health Hospital in Bemidji. And they work in residential facilities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities like the Lake Owasso Residence in Ramsey County.

For these members who are certified peer recovery specialists, Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, home health aides, social workers, counselors, mental health technicians and intake staff, their work is not just a job. It's a calling. They have been and are on the front lines of treating COVID-19 at great risk to their own health. They bear witness to how the job loss, isolation, death, and illness from COVID-19 have traumatized staff and families, and increased the risk for depression, anxiety, substance use disorder, and even suicidal ideation. They have worked long shifts, are challenged by understaffing and are under enormous stress that has not let up. They are in pain and at great risk of burnout. We can acknowledge the work of these unsung heroes by acknowledging the high emotional toll of their work.

**As you consider how to help revitalize our health care workforce, we urge you to establish a multi-year federal grant program to help states provide health care workers with needed behavioral health services.** Such a grant program must remove the stigma from needing behavioral health care services, ensure that workers are not penalized for seeking help, and provide

health care workers with the behavioral health care services they need to build and sustain resilience. Addressing and preventing future burnout is important to current and future health care workers. It is also vital to patients. Staff burnout and high staff turnover result in waiting lists for treatment, inconsistent care, wasted resources, and poor results.

We also encourage you to look at additional funding which would be specifically targeted to rectify high staff turnover. This is how we can show our respect to this workforce and the people they serve. We stand ready to work with you to remedy this dire situation.

Sincerely,

Julie Bleyhl  
Executive Director  
AFSCME Council 5

Shannon Douvier  
Executive Director  
AFSCME Council 65