

Testimony in support of:
Senate Bill 2155

March 15, 2023

Chairman Weisz, Vice Cahir Rohr and House Human Services Committee Members, my name is Rachel Thomas and I work for Northland Health Centers as the Chief Financial Officer. Northland Health Centers serves eight communities in the central and northern areas of the state, with most of these communities having less than 500 individuals in the cities' populations. We provide medical, dental, and behavioral healthcare services. With the support of federal and private funds we have been able to provide MAT (Medication-Assisted Treatment) services in nearly all our communities for over five years and are proud to say we have helped over 200 individuals receive opioid use disorder care. We have also been providing traditional behavioral healthcare services in one of our communities for the past eight years and are looking to hire staff and expand that service to reach other communities that don't have those available services. By voting yes, you can assist us in expanding that reach, and help us invest in communities that need these services.

The patients we serve in the communities without behavioral healthcare are those that are most vulnerable, some fall under 200% of the federal poverty guidelines and some don't have the means of transportation to travel to an area where those services are provided. By not providing behavioral healthcare services to these individuals, the risk of preventable ER admissions increases, community involvement decreases, and overall health and wellbeing of these individuals deteriorates. There is a huge need in our smaller communities, and we are committed to providing behavioral healthcare services to those individuals. The risk we take is pulling current staff out of production (leaving another gap in care) to travel to these small communities and meet the unmet needs of our patients. By supporting this bill, it would ensure health centers could provide the needed care without an added risk.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 2155 so that in the underserved areas of our state individuals can receive the behavioral healthcare they need.

Thank you for your consideration.