

Testimony

Senate Bill No. 2268

Human Services Committee

Chairman Lee

January 24, 2023

Good morning Chairman Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, thank you for allowing me to appear before you today. My name is Amanda Lindstrom. I am a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker in the states of Minnesota and North Dakota. I have worked in the social work/human services field in various capacities including developmental disabilities, child protection and mental health for over 18 years. I have been employed by Fraser, Ltd. nearly 7 years working as an outpatient mental health therapist and the Clinical Administrator of Valley Hope Counseling Services which is a program within Fraser, Ltd.

Valley Hope Counseling Services currently employs four therapists that provide outpatient mental health services through in person or telehealth therapy throughout the community. Valley Hope additionally directly supports the Stepping Stones Resource Center providing mental health support to the youth in various capacities such as disability verifications, individual therapy, group therapy, and crisis support. Valley Hope provides mental health services to youth with or without insurance to limit any barriers for the youth in accessing needed services.

I have directly observed the importance of having a Resource Center for one of the most vulnerable populations in our communities. I have had the opportunity to get to know many of the youth within a safe therapeutic space. The youth that access services through the Stepping Stones Resource Center have experienced complex trauma with the vast majority experiencing significant childhood trauma.

They are individuals that from the start of their lives experienced unfathomable life circumstances such as physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and/or sexual abuse that no person should ever have to experience. They often then enter the child welfare/child protection systems in which they are placed into foster care or residential treatment settings. A large percentage of the youth we serve “aged out of the system” with no place to go once they turn 18. Their birth connections have been lost or are not safe and the systems that were put in place to protect them often let them go when they turn 18. The question we all need to ask ourselves, is where do we expect individuals that have experienced numerous traumas with no support system, no credit history, no home and no money to go?

They need a safe place to meet their basic needs and develop a support system to become independent in the community. I have directly observed youth come into the program off of the street with no place to go. With the right supports, many of these individuals have gone on to graduate from high school, go to college, become employed and obtain their own housing within the community. They wouldn't have been able to do this without the support of programs such as The Stepping Stones Resource Center. Because Valley Hope also provides mental health services for the whole community, I have been able to continue to work with several of the youth even after they left transitional youth programming. They are working, paying rent, and contributing in various capacities to better our communities.

I ask you to please support Senate Bill No 2268, not only for the youth we serve but to show as a community and state that we acknowledge that all people deserve shelter, support and treatment especially individuals that had a harder start in life. This concludes my testimony. I sincerely thank you for your time and consideration.

Amanda Lindstrom, LCSW (ND), LICSW (MN)

Fraser, Ltd.