



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

May 3, 2019

Dear Colleagues,

We are writing to express support for establishing in the 2019-2021 state budget an annual \$500,000 matching grant for a qualified treatment trainee (QTT) program at the Department of Health Services to create a public/private partnership to grow the supply of mental and behavioral health therapists who are trained to treat the needs of kids and families.

A child's mental health significantly impacts their overall health, well-being and development. One in five young people will have a serious mental health concern that affects their ability to learn. Mental illnesses are associated with increased risk for chronic diseases including substance abuse, diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

Nearly 50 of Wisconsin's 72 counties are designated as significant shortage areas for adult and pediatric mental health providers, including counselors, therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, only 52 percent of children ages 3-17 with a mental or behavioral health condition in Wisconsin<sup>2</sup> received treatment. There are approximately 1.5 million children in Wisconsin, yet there are only 150 child and adolescent psychiatrists practicing in the state. Nationally, there are 94 child, family and school social workers to every 100,000 residents; however in Wisconsin, there are only 60 social workers per 100,000 residents.<sup>3</sup> Lengthy wait times for care and lack of mental and behavioral health assessments and treatment result in unmet healthcare needs among children and adolescents.

Kids need people to care for them who are specially trained to understand their developing bodies and minds. An alarming shortage of pediatric mental health providers in Wisconsin and across the country contributes to the difficulty families have in accessing the mental and behavioral health care their children need. In fact, Wisconsin ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation related to access as measured by youth with major depression who did not receive mental health services.<sup>4</sup> We recognize that the state plays a critical role in investing in key workforce development areas and believe that growing the mental and behavioral health workforce is one of those critical areas. Growing the workforce of adequately trained and qualified mental and behavioral health care providers for children and adolescents is a critical next step to improving access to care in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

State Rep. Joan Ballweg

State Rep. Pat Snyder

State Rep. Paul Tittel

State Rep. Jesse James

State Rep. Nancy VanderMeer

State Rep. Bob Kulp

State Rep. Rob Hutton

State Rep. John Jagler

<sup>1</sup> WI DHS Primary Care HPIA Map, 2013

<sup>2</sup> 2017-18 HHS National Survey of Children's Health

<sup>3</sup> 2017 Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health Report

<sup>4</sup> State of Mental Health in America Report 2018