

March 11, 2024

The Honorable Robert Bierman  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
579 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: American Medical Association strong support for SF 3531 and HF 4188 to support physicians and other health care professionals' health and well-being

Dear Representative Bierman:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I write in strong support of SF 3531 and HF 4188, which would help remove stigma and better support physicians and other health care professionals seeking care for their health and well-being. Supporting physicians' health and wellness is a key pillar of AMA advocacy, and SF 3531 and HF 4188 would have immediate, positive effects for all health care professionals in Minnesota. Moreover, the AMA views the provisions of SF 3531 and HF 4188 as a national best practice to help inform other state legislatures.

**We strongly urge a "Yes" vote on both SF 3531 and HF 4188.**

The AMA supports SF 3531 and HF 4188 in their entirety and wants to highlight the provisions in Subdivision 3 as particularly noteworthy. This section would require credentialing applications used by hospitals, health systems, and others to prohibit past disclosure of past health conditions if they are being treated and do not represent a threat to patient safety. Mandating disclosure of past treatment or diagnosis of a mental health condition or substance use disorder has been cited by medical students and physicians as a key driver for why they do not seek care:

- More than 40 percent of physicians said they have not sought care for burnout or depression because of fear of their medical board or employer finding out.<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly half of residents surveyed, including nearly two-thirds of Black residents, said that they were fearful of seeking mental health care because of questions about mental health in licensure, credentialing and insurance applications.<sup>2</sup>

The Physicians Foundation survey cited above also found that in addition to reporting high levels of burnout and fear of seeking care because of stigmatizing questions on medical licensing and credentialing applications, nearly half of medical students, four in 10 residents, and one-fifth of practicing physicians also report that they know a peer or colleague who has considered, attempted, or died by suicide—increases from 2022 and 2021. The AMA strongly supports SF 3531 and HF 4188 because they remove a major reason why medical students, residents, and practicing physicians do not seek care. Simply put, SF 3531 and HF 4188 will help save lives.

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<sup>1</sup> 'I Cry but No One Cares': Physician Burnout & Depression Report 2023. Medscape. January 27, 2023. Available at <https://www.medscape.com/slideshow/2023-lifestyle-burnout-6016058#25>

<sup>2</sup> 2023 Survey of America's Physicians. The Physicians Foundation. June 2023. Available at [https://physiciansfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/PF23\\_Brochure-Report\\_Americas-Physicians\\_V2b-1-2.pdf](https://physiciansfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/PF23_Brochure-Report_Americas-Physicians_V2b-1-2.pdf)

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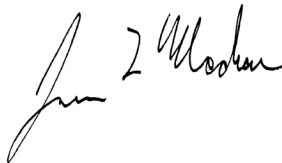
The changes that would be made by SF 3531 and HF 4188 already have precedent in Minnesota, which updated its medical licensing questions several years ago in response to a medical student's death by suicide.<sup>3</sup> With SF 3531 and HF 4188, Minnesota's medical students, residents, and physicians will not have to fear seeking care for their mental health and well-being. The language in SF 3531 and HF 4188 is not only consistent with our national advocacy, but also with organizations similarly committed to removing stigmatizing language on credentialing and other applications. This includes the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation, Federation of State Medical Boards, National Association of Medical Staff Services, Federation of State Physician Health Programs, and numerous other state and national organizations that support similar policies.

In addition to supporting the removal of the stigmatizing language on credentialing applications, the AMA also strongly supports provisions in SF 3531 and HF 4188 that help establish and fund physician wellness programs, including confidentiality protections for participants in those programs. These provisions go hand-in-hand to support medical students and physicians who seek care for their personal well-being and wellness. These are additional reasons why the AMA strongly urges a "Yes" vote on both SF 3531 and HF 4188.

Please contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center, at [daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org](mailto:daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org) if you have any questions.

Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim L Madara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James L. Madara, MD

cc: Minnesota Medical Association

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<sup>3</sup> Why a group of U of M med school residents pushed to get Minnesota to change its medical licensure language. Minnesota Post. October 13, 2021. Available at <https://www.minnpost.com/mental-health-addiction/2021/10/why-a-group-of-u-of-m-med-school-residents-pushed-to-get-minnesota-to-change-its-medical-licensure-language/>