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June 24, 2022

Chairwoman Debra Savage and Members  
Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board  
525 West Jefferson Street, Second Floor  
Springfield, Illinois 62761

Re: Project No. 22-017 – Letter of Support  
Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Campus

Dear Chairwoman Savage and Members:

This letter is submitted in support of the proposed child and adolescent behavioral health campus in Peoria.

I have been a Mental Health Clinician for UnityPoint's Child and Adolescent inpatient program since 2020 and have been a licensed counselor since 2010. The current inpatient program serves children aged 4-11 and adolescents aged 12-17. Our maximum number of patients has been 23, but often we are not able to accept that many due to our lack of individual rooms that are required for covid infection control and to meet the needs of transgender individuals. There are so many children and teens in need of more specialized and comprehensive services that are currently unavailable. In Central Illinois there is a large gap in services for children and teens; there is only brief inpatient treatment and outpatient treatment. The community would benefit from varying levels of care such as partial hospitalization and intensive outpatient services. A new and expanded facility would help us to finally meet these needs.

For the inpatient program specifically, I am looking forward to a more child and teen friendly environment as the current one is quite small and dark. It would be beneficial to have an inpatient program that allowed for fresh air, physical activity, and alternative therapies like art and play. The current program also lacks a calming space such as the ones utilized in many hospitals and behavioral schools to help reduce incidences of aggression, which in turn decreases seclusions and restraints that are traumatic to patients and staff.

There are specific areas where the community is particularly lacking and in need of more resources. Childhood and adolescent onset psychotic disorders is one of these populations. The First IL Program is a state funded program to provide comprehensive services to people having a first psychotic episode as young as 14. However in Peoria the services are only provided to adults and needs to be extended to adolescents. A larger facility could provide space for this underserved population.

Another group that lacks services are teens with eating disorders that are frequently seen on our inpatient unit. Our answer is to refer them to the OSF eating disorders program however this has limitations as they do not accept all Medicaid, their PHP has 4 openings at a time, they often have a 2 month wait for evaluation, and if there are any medical complications they refer to an inpatient program in the Chicago area. Our current adolescent inpatient program at UnityPoint is not equipped to meet the needs of teens with severe eating disorders but having a facility that includes some medicals beds would allow us to serve this population and not force families to be separated during their child's treatment.

Psychological testing is a recurring issue that we encounter for our children and teens. Without formal psychological testing it can be difficult to determine what adaptations children and teens require. Additionally as we seek community services and funding for residential treatment through grants, psychological evaluations are a state requirement. If the child has Medicaid they will often wait a year for this appointment. Having the space and funding to support a psychologist that is able to meet this need would be greatly beneficial.

My last concern is in regards to the lack of play therapy available to children, particularly those on Medicaid. Play therapy is researched to be clinically indicated, effective, and trauma informed care for children up to age 12. Play therapy is not effectively utilized on the current inpatient unit due to the lack of a play therapy room and equipment. There are community programs to serve children with Medicaid however all have high caseloads and many do not provide play therapy creating an issue where children cannot get consistent and effective therapy. An expanded facility with space for inpatient and outpatient play therapy offices would be a great asset to serving our community's children most in need of emotional healing.

In summary, these are just a few of the deficits I have noticed in Central Illinois. As a certified Child-Centered Play Therapist and Child and Adolescent Trauma Professional, I am beyond excited and grateful that the Young Minds Project is becoming a reality. What would be the outcome if parents, grandparents, and foster parents seeking help and answers weren't met with vague responses telling them they need to wait a year for services or that the service just doesn't exist? What would be the outcome for children and teens if after experiencing trauma, depression, anxiety, and confusion about their mental health they found themselves in a place that felt safe, supportive and could provide ongoing care through their formative years? I think that these families and children would feel the hope and healing that myself and all our committed staff desire for them. I am hopeful that the Young Minds Project will receive the space and funding needed to make these services a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kim Scardina' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kim Scardina, MA, LCPC