

March 8, 2024

Dear Members of the Senate Education Policy Committee:

NAMI Minnesota is writing to support SF 3771 to educate coaches on eating disorders.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, “eating disorders often involve serious medical complications that can cause permanent damage or death. People with eating disorders also have an increased risk of dying by suicide.” Body image problems, disordered eating, and eating disorders are common among athletes. Weight-class and aesthetic sports have particularly high numbers of participants with disordered eating. The National Eating Disorder Association says about 33% of male athletes and up to 62% of female athletes in these types of sports are affected by disordered eating. In team sports, team members may adopt one another’s disordered eating habits.

Early detection of eating disorders is one of the best predictors of full recovery. Since most people will develop an eating disorder in their teen and young adult years, interventions in high schools would have an outsized impact in preventing the most serious harm and supporting healthy coping skills to last lifetimes. Coaches are well-suited to intervene because they “are on the front lines of athletes’ lives, and often the first to notice subtle changes in mood, behavior, and performance that may indicate an eating disorder” (National Eating Disorder Association).

You can’t tell whether someone has an eating disorder simply by looking at them. Bodies vary greatly, especially while they are still growing and developing. Specialized education is required to be able to identify signs and symptoms of eating disorders and to be able to mitigate eating disorder risk factors.

Ultimately, prevention is the best strategy for all health problems, including eating disorders. If athletic coaches know the signs and symptoms to identify eating disorders early and to know available resources to prevent eating disorders from developing or worsening, they can help students avoid the need for intensive or emergency treatment.

NAMI Minnesota supports SF 3771 to provide coaches with eating disorder prevention education resources. This education is worth the investment because it could save children’s lives. Thank you for considering this bill.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director

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