



February 15, 2022

Sen. Jim Abeler
3215 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Sen. Karin Housley
3217 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Sen. Abeler and Sen. Housley:

As you know, the Best Life Alliance is a statewide coalition made up of more than 130 provider organizations, people with disabilities, families and supporters. We were founded in 2014 and advocate for Home and Community-Based Waiver Services supporting people with disabilities (HCBS).

We would like to send our sincere appreciation for the amendments being offered to SF2786 authored by Sen. Housley. In Minnesota, the direct care and support workforce shortage has reached crisis levels with numerous residential providers having to close program sites and employment/day support providers facing rapidly growing waiting lists of individuals unable to access services. The impact is felt across the industry, from self-directed services and personal care assistance to home and community-based waiver services.

The widespread inability to find direct care and support workers jeopardizes the health and well-being of Minnesotans with disabilities and older adults who depend on these services. Even when caregivers can be hired, it is difficult to keep workers in their positions due to fierce competition for low wage workers. This workforce crisis has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and we've seen an increase in family members that are forced to walk away from their own careers to care for loved ones themselves.

The amendment allowing for sign on bonuses and retention grants for workers who remain in positions is an important tool that provider organizations can use for recruitment of new workers and a huge "thank you" to workers who continue to stay in these critical disability direct support roles. Additionally, advancing the scheduled DWRS inflationary adjustment for all individuals to April 1st is critical in support of providers in addressing the staffing crisis. These short-term steps will help try to stabilize the workforce as we work on needed longer term reform of wages and benefits for these critical workers.

Since the COVID Pandemic hit in early 2020, Home and Community-Based Disability Service providers and their direct care staff have been striving to meet critical needs across the state. Staff have been providing essential services to the individual that need them with little options to work from home. Amid a crisis level workforce shortage, direct care staff have worked extra shifts, longer hours and provided a sense of normalcy to the individuals that they support during a

time when nothing was normal.

The Best Life Alliance is appreciative of your time and continued commitment to Home and Community Based Services for Minnesotans with disabilities. If you have questions for the Best Life Alliance, please reach out to Sara Grafstrom at sgrafstrom@arm.org.

Sincerely,

Best Life Alliance Coalition Members