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March 29, 2022

To: Chair Utke and Senate Health and Human Services Committee Members

From: Cathy McLeer, State Director, AARP Minnesota

RE: **AARP's Support for Senator Housley's SF 3195**

On behalf of AARP's 630,000 members and all older Minnesotans, we appreciate the Senate's attention in addressing the challenges in the long-term care workforce. We are writing to support Senator Housley's bill, **Senate File 3195**. This bill will make needed investments in the workforce by increasing wages to help recruit and retain direct care workers.

The gravity of the current workforce crisis will require additional resources and investments as envisioned in this bill to protect residents in nursing homes and other residential facilities, individuals who need assistance in their homes and communities, and address the growing health needs of older Minnesotans.

AARP has long called for fair pay, benefits, and improved working conditions for those caring for the health and well-being of our most vulnerable seniors. Nursing homes often have chronic staff shortages because of relatively low pay, difficult working conditions, and limited benefits. The new investments in **Senate File 3195** will go a long way in helping to recruit and retain these dedicated, hard-working individuals.

With the new funding, accountability must follow. While we strongly support the provision in this bill that ensures funding goes directly to nursing home direct care staff, we would also recommend that nursing homes provide proof that the money was indeed spent on the workforce beyond self-attestation. ***We appreciate the amendment language that would claw back the funds if they were not spent on the workforce directly.***

AARP strongly supports the new home and community-based care investments, including increases to the Elderly Waiver program. **However, we would urge you to support increases to non-Medicaid programs, including the Alternative Care, and Essential Community Support programs as well.** AARP survey data show that most older Minnesotans want to remain in their homes and communities for as long as

possible. These programs are cost-effective, too, as, on average, in-home care costs are one-third of nursing home care under Medicaid.

Now more than ever, we need more direct care workers, as the shortage will only grow as the population ages. Beyond wages, AARP also urges lawmakers to expand access to critical benefits, including paid leave and access to health insurance.

AARP looks forward to working with lawmakers this session to help solve the workforce crisis, make nursing homes safer and help seniors stay in their own homes. Thank you again for your attention to this matter.

