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April 4, 2022

To: Chair Abler and Senate Human Services Committee Members

From: Cathy McLeer, State Director, AARP Minnesota

RE: AARP's Comments on Senate Health and Human Services Omnibus Budget (HF 4410)

On behalf of AARP's 630,000 members and all older Minnesotans, we appreciate the attention paid to addressing the crisis in the long-term care workforce. Now more than ever, we need more direct care workers, as the shortage will only grow as the population ages. We are writing to support the necessary investments in the workforce in HF 4410 by increasing wages to help recruit and retain direct care workers.

AARP strongly supports the rate increases to home and community-based care services, including increases in the Elderly Waiver program, Personal Care Attendant Services, and increases in Home Care Provider rates. **However, we urge you to support increases to the Elderly Waiver program for older Minnesotans living in their own homes.** This is the only category of services that did not receive an increase in your budget. We also urge you to fund increases for services beyond homemakers in other non-Medicaid programs serving the elderly, including the Alternative Care and Essential Community Support programs.

AARP survey data show that most older Minnesotans want to remain in their homes 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.

In addition, AARP supports the new investments in Nursing Facilities. 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 will go a long way in helping to recruit and retain these dedicated, hard-working individuals. AARP also supports the accountability provisions, which require facilities to create a distribution plan on how the wages will be distributed to the workforce and requirements that any funds not spent on the workforce be returned.

Finally, AARP is disappointed to see that the policy recently adopted to expedite access to home and community-based services, known as presumptive eligibility, was not funded in this bill. As the session continues, we urge lawmakers to fully fund this provision to help older Minnesotans start receiving services in their homes when a need arises and avoid unnecessary admissions to nursing homes.

Thank you for your work on this critical bill. 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. If you have questions or wish to discuss this matter further, please contact AARP Advocacy's Director, Mary Jo George, at mgeorge@aarp.org or 651-271-6586.

