

Personal Testimony

Senate SF 1022

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Hello, I'm Kathy Merkel, an 11- year Long Term Caregiver, President of the Family Council, and a resident from northern Minnesota. My brother and I served as our mother's caregiver at a Nursing Home. I was her caregiver from December 2010 until January 2022. My brother was a great caregiver until he passed away unexpectedly in February 2021. Our mother went to heaven on January 29, 2022, after suffering a second stroke, and month long stay at the Intensive Care Unit in Duluth, Minnesota. Every single day we visited and advocated for Mom (3 times a day—breakfast, lunch, dinner for my brother—even visiting on works breaks) and I advocated several times a day and night. I daily communicated and asked for help on issues and concerns from our Regional Ombudsman for Long Term Care. We were on call 24/7 for 11 years. All we wanted was good care, safety, and the well -being of our mother.

I'd like to take this opportunity to share and stress the challenges of having a mother who lives in a Nursing Home in rural Minnesota. Due to sparse populations and dynamics of the rural area, the following are critical issues that pose a strong barrier:

· **Location**

- o There are fewer options for Seniors to find in-house or assisted care
- o Re-location out of the area is an option, but it is hard for our Mom (any Senior) to move far away from their homes, and we, as caregivers, would need to re-locate too.
- o Census (number of ratio of staff to residents) limits intake
- o Many times there are waiting lists for Long Term Care facilities

· **Recruitment and Retention of Staff**

- o Although this is a State and national issue, it's worse in rural Minnesota trying to find people to take care of our Seniors due to smaller population and dynamics of the communities
- o Competitive wages needed
 - § Other professions compete with wages
- o Long Term Care staff are NOT paid the wages they deserve

- o Fewer qualified staff; There are nursing assistant and nursing staff, “Gems” but they are very limited

- **Limited Medical Professionals**

- o Rural locations and Long-Term Care Facilities lack the medical professionals needed.
- o Nurse Practitioners and Doctors are aging, and are retiring.
- o Extensive medical care is required due to the increase of medical conditions and medications requires for the Seniors.

I strongly urge you to support the SF 1022 today for the Seniors in the State of Minnesota who deserve a Qualified Plan for their lives. Although, I was blessed and grateful for the opportunity to serve as our Mother’s caregiver, and have no regrets, it was very hard. Any and all programs that support our Seniors are desperately needed. Our Seniors deserve dignity, care, qualified staff, and wonderful and safe end of life settings they call home.

Thank you.

Kathy Merkel

Virginia, Minnesota

