

February 15, 2023

Chair Hoffman and Human Services Committee members, my name is Ted Stamp, and I'm just one of the many persons with a disability across the state affected by this current statutory restriction, which SF 1597 will finally fix.

Since 2017 I have been working with advocates around the state to find a practical solution for this unnecessary statutory restriction that prevents Personal Care Attendants (PCAs), on whom persons like me daily rely, to drive us to and from work, medical appointments, or anywhere else in the community. This restriction is the greater for folks who live in Greater Minnesota, since access to community transit buses during the evenings and on weekends is only available for limited hours, and only by prescheduled appointment during weekdays, which means if you face an emergency during these times you are forced to financially burden the State by calling an ambulance.

Unnecessary, illogical program restrictions like this one not only prevent individuals from gaining and maintaining competitive employment and access to other community activities and services, in many cases it puts individuals at greater risk of death or serious medical conditions that might have been prevented if adequate transportation had enabled the person to gain timely access to needed care.

When individuals are forced to use medi-van services to access out-of-town medical appointments, does it make sense that the State should pay the drivers of these vehicles at a higher rate than a PCA could be paid for doing the same job? Especially since the PCA is often riding along anyway, which means the State is paying for two people (driver and caregiver) when just one is necessary to do both jobs.

Lastly, under the present statutory restriction, how are such individuals supposed to visit out-of-town family and friends, especially for special occasions like holidays, weddings, or funerals? Moreover, allowing PCAs to drive their clients will also alleviate the already overburdened public transit systems statewide for those who still want or need to use them (this not only includes making rides more available, but reducing extended wait times for rides).

Please, members of the Committee, I implore you not to let this desperately needed amendment language be passed over yet again for one reason or other—please, please see this through to the end. Thank you so much for taking the time to understand the important impacts of this issue on Minnesotans with disabilities and the State, and for the honor and privilege of offering this testimony.

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