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March 30, 2023

To: Chair Hoffman and Members of the Human Services Committee

From: Cathy McLeer, State Director, AARP MN

RE: Senate Human Services Omnibus Bill (SF 2934)

Dear Senator Hoffman and Committee Members,

On behalf of AARP's 620,000 members and all older Minnesotans, we appreciate the opportunity to provide our comments on **SF 2934**. Overall, we want to thank you for the investments in SF 2934 that allow seniors to live in their homes and communities. We are especially pleased with the significant investments in the Live Well at Home Program.

These investments will address the critical workforce shortage, offer seniors more choices, and save taxpayers' money, as in-home care costs one-third of nursing home care on average in Medicaid. We also want to thank you for investing in the workforce providing care to Minnesota nursing home residents. It's critical to address the workforce crisis in these settings too.

However, given the historic budget surplus, we would like to continue working with committee members to make higher investments in home and community-based services and to fund other critical initiatives, including ways to expedite access to these services and funding for the Age-Friendly community and technical grants.

Comments on Key Aging-Related Provisions We Support:

Investments in Home and Community-Based Services Rates

AARP supports the investments that keep people in their homes and communities. This includes rate increases for the Elderly Waiver (EW); Alternative Care (AC); Essential Community Support Programs (ESC), and Consumer First Services and Supports (CFFS) programs. The new funding will undoubtedly address the gravity of the workforce shortage crisis in these settings and put Medicaid's long-term spending in line with people's priorities for independence.

We also support the increase for the Consumer Directed Community Supports (CDCS) option under the EW Waiver program and for providing parity between CDCS and other waiver services to make it

more appealing for people to use this option. This program is vital in allowing older adults to hire family and friends rather than relying solely on the direct care workforce, which can help alleviate the crisis in the workforce shortage.

Expansion of the Live Well at Home Grants

AARP is thrilled with the significant Live Well at Home grant program funding. This program provides critical services such as respite, chore services, and transportation using volunteers to keep seniors in their homes and out of more expensive residential and institutional settings. Using volunteers not only helps alleviate the workforce crisis, but it can also keep seniors from spending down their assets and applying for more expensive waiver options. With this funding, changes can be made to the program to strengthen provider capacity in rural areas and other hard-to-serve areas of the state.

Senior Hunger

AARP is pleased with the increased funding for the senior nutrition program. This funding would reduce food insecurity and poverty and improve health outcomes, including reduced hospitalizations among low-income older adults. New state funding is needed to address food security for older Minnesotans, including for aging Black and Hispanic households and rising food costs due to inflation.

MA Income Limit Increase and Paid Hour Limits for Spouse

AARP supports lifting the cap beyond 40 hours a week for spouses to care for their loved ones under the CFSS (Community First Services and Supports) and the CDCS (Consumer Directed Community Support) programs. We also support increasing the Medical Assistance Limit so that individuals have more money to pay for necessities such as rent and food.

Investments in the Nursing Home Workforce

AARP supports investments to designate certain nursing facilities as critical access facilities. We also support the investments in the workforce providing care to Minnesota nursing home residents to address the workforce crisis in these settings. 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.

Any new investments should be tied directly to workers' wages, quality outcomes, and accountability measures to taxpayers. This will go a long way in helping to recruit and retain dedicated, hard-working individuals in these facilities.

Comments on Key Aging-Related Provisions We Urge the Committee to Reconsider:

Extension of the Age-Friendly Council

As Minnesota surpasses one million older adults this year, we are disappointed the bill does not include the Governor's proposal to extend the Age-Friendly Council through June 30, 2027, to continue the work of Minnesota's entry into the World Health Organization's Age-friendly Network of States and Communities. The council is working to develop a ten-year strategic plan that will focus on equity and improving the lives of older Minnesotans by promoting change and coordinating the work of state agencies, local governments, and the private sector to build a more age-friendly state.

We are equally disappointed that the bill does not extend the essential funding for community and technical assistance grants to counties, tribal nations, and community organizations seeking to become Age-Friendly Communities. As the population ages, we must both prepare as a state and prepare our communities for the rapidly aging demographic shift.

Expedited Access to Home and Community-Based Services (Presumptive Eligibility)

AARP was disappointed that the Governor's budget only included a study to expedite access to home and community-based services known as presumptive eligibility, and very disappointed the Senate bill does not even fund this. We are hopeful that as negotiations continue, we can work with lawmakers to adopt a presumptive eligibility policy rather than just study it.

This provision can help older Minnesotans and people with disabilities to start receiving services in their homes when needed and avoid unnecessary admissions to nursing homes and lengthy hospital stays. Several states have implemented this policy during the COVID crisis. It successfully saved the lives of older residents in congregate settings and saved significant tax dollars.

Thank you again for your work on this critical bill and the investments in home and community-based programs. AARP looks forward to working with lawmakers this session to address the gaps we have identified, including more investments in home and community-based services and funding for the Age-Friendly Council and grants and Presumptive Eligibility to fast-track access to these services.

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



