

March 31, 2023



Re: SF 2934 Human Services Omnibus

To: Members of the Senate Human Services Committee

Chair Hoffman and Committee Members,

Thank you for the work you have done this session to bring attention to the many complex issues impacting Minnesotans with disabilities statewide. We see many provisions included in the omnibus bill that will be directly beneficial to people with disabilities.

We are grateful for the inclusion of the following:

- **Provider capacity grants for rural and underserved communities** (Article 1; Section 8): We support investments in areas that have been historically underfunded to ensure all Minnesotans with disabilities have access to the supports and services they need.
- **Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Workforce Incentive Grants Program** (Article 1; Section 11): One factor contributing to the workforce shortage is the lack of benefits for these critical roles. People in direct support positions deserve to be valued for their important work. Incentives for the direct care workforce are another important part of the solution.
- **More access to Supported Decision Making** (Article 1; Sections 12 and 60): We are so grateful for the investment in grants and the reimbursement study for the establishment of a Medical Assistance (MA) service to enhance supported decision making services in our state. We must promote autonomy and the least restrictive options for disabled Minnesotans.
- The long overdue **changes to the Personal Care Assistance (PCA) program to allow PCAs to drive** (Article 1; Sections 13-16): This small change will have a major impact on the lives of people with disabilities who access PCA services. This bill ensures people have access to their communities.
- **Lifting the 40-hour cap for parents of minors and spouses** (Article 1; Sections 19, 42-43): To help address the disability services workforce crisis, we must maximize the current workers we have – including parents and spouses. This is a simple change that will make a big difference for families.
- **Disability Waiver Rate System (DWRS) rate increases** (line 199 on spreadsheet), **PCA/Community First Services and Supports (CFSS) Rate increases** (line 222 on spreadsheet), **Rate increases for home care services** (line 673 on spreadsheet): We need to address the direct care workforce shortage from all angles, which includes rate increases so that we can better retain the staff we have. Many DWRS, homecare, and PCA/CFSS services are critical to supporting people to live in their own homes. However, the direct care staffing shortage has made this increasingly difficult for Minnesotans with disabilities. Many people with disabilities face a difficult choice of living in their own homes, in their communities or having to move to more restrictive, expensive settings to get their basic needs met. Much of this is due to the critical direct care shortage. Investments in rate increases that boost wages are one important part of the solution to make sure people have true informed choice in where they live.

- **Expansion of shared services** (Article 1; Sections 32-33, 62-63): This is a workforce shortage solution that is cost-effective, uses less staff to care for more people, and upholds the informed choice and autonomy of people with disabilities.
- **Budget increase for Consumer-Directed Community Supports (CDCS)** (Article 1; Section 53): Individuals accessing CDCS have struggled to maintain their direct care staff. Budget increases will help them to pay their direct care workers higher wages and remain in their homes with the self-directed supports they choose.
- **Direct Care Service Corps Pilot Project** (Article 1, Section 54): This provision provides a creative solution that upholds the informed choice of disabled Minnesotans who want to remain in their own homes.
- **Stakeholder engagement on Life-Sharing Services** (Article 1; Section 64): This is an innovative and transformative way to ensure people with disabilities can be in their communities, building natural supports. We support the language to strengthen the reimbursement model for life sharing providers and life sharing agencies in consultation with providers, people with disabilities, advocacy organizations, and lead agencies.
- **Increase in the MA income standard** (Article 2, Section 50): Increasing the income standard will help the people accessing MA and work toward an end to the cycle of poverty so many people with disabilities face while accessing these programs.
- **Elimination of parental fees for MA** (Article 3; Sections 1 and 9): Your commitment to ending the tax on parents and families of children with disabilities will have long-lasting impacts. This policy is truly a tax on disability and we support any efforts to ensure people have access to the supports and services they need.
- **Reform to Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities (MA-EPD)** (Article 3 Sections 2-4): We support this long overdue reform that will help remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities. This is a smart and transformative change that will improve the lives of so many Minnesotans with disabilities.
- **Increases to Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) rates and ambulance services** (Article 3; Sections 5-6): Transportation barriers is the most common issue we hear from our stakeholders. These services are especially essential in greater Minnesota.

As you continue negotiations throughout the rest of this legislative session, we hope you will consider proposals that were missing from this omnibus bill such as:

- **The Governor's proposal to phase out the use of subminimum wage in Minnesota:** Ending this antiquated practice will benefit all of Minnesota, but especially people with disabilities. Not only is it a civil rights violation that has gone on for too long, but it has kept people with disabilities segregated and created inequities in the workforce for all people with disabilities—not just those who are paid subminimum wages.
- **Changes to Individualized Home Supports (IHS)** (SF 654): IHS services are essential services in supporting people with disabilities living in their own homes. Allowing for the same flexibilities that are available in other services like indirect and out-of-state (temporary travel) billing will make IHS more accessible.
- **Task Force on Disability Services Accessibility** (SF 2972): This proposal works to ensure our state's disability services are accessible in ways that work for everyone and most importantly,

that people with disabilities are included in the assessment and proposed solutions to accessibility barriers.

We are still in the process of analyzing all of the provisions included in the omnibus bill, and will provide a more thorough assessment as conference committees convene. We look forward to continued collaboration as you work to pass bills that have a positive impact on the lives of your constituents with disabilities and the Minnesotans with disabilities across the state. Thank you for the work you have done so far this session.

Sincerely,

Julia Page  
*Public Policy Director*