

Gebi Tufaa  
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Blaine, MN 55449  
February 23, 2024

Chair Hoffman and Members of the Committee on Human Services  
MN Senate Building  
95 University Ave, W.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Hoffman and Members of the Committee on Human Services:

My name is Gebi Tufaa from Blaine. I am writing to you in support of SF 3841.

I am a board member of the Alliance of Residential Service Providers (ARSP), an association that has close to 40 members. ARSP was established in December, 2023 with the primary purpose of increasing education and advocacy for its members, encouraging affiliation and cooperation with other associations of a similar purpose and interest, addressing the problems and concerns in providing residential services while offering mutual support among members. As a provider of Family Residential Service (FRS) for 10 years, I believe that the DWRS flat rate negatively impacts the services that I provide to the people under my care and therefore it is important to me and all members of our association to see this bill pass.

My wife and I have been providing a family residential service to three residents whom we consider part of our family. One of these residents is a veteran with traumatic brain injury requiring a high level of care and is legally blind (visual field deficit), and doesn't remember most of the activities he has done during the day or whether he ate food or not. He is a very lovely young man who moved to our home from a group home and has been living with us for about six years. He came to our home with the long list of documented behaviors in his MnChoice assessment which was scary in the beginning. We treated him and other residents at our home as part of our family and provided them a person-centered service with empathy. He needed continuous attention, and he would start picking his nails and skins when bored. We have to continue engaging with him and make him occupied and avoid boredom.

During his 45-day review, his family and his case manager were surprised about the significant improvement and progress he made within such a short period of time. He has an amazing and loving family who truly care about him and are very respectful and helpful to us. Before he moved to our home his mom had a concern when she left town for an extended period of time in case he demonstrates some negative behaviors as he doesn't get a chance to visit her often. Only a few months after he moved to our home, the family felt very comfortable and went for a long vacation (as long as two to three months). Now we feel like a family with his mom and sister and they do not have any concerns about his well-being as he is in a good hand. He enjoys playing with our 10 years old and is very happy to hear her voice when she comes home from school. His mom has been on vacation since early January this year and could have written a testimony about the service we provide to this lovely young veteran.

Some of our residents came from a group home where their family weren't happy with the services they received. There are a lot of behavioral issues documented about these residents and their family told us that they had a hard time finding the right CRS home for them. However, after they moved to our FRS home, we accepted them as part of our family and treated them as such. Our third resident moved to our home from a nursing home. He was living at the nursing home due to self-neglect at his apartment, but he didn't like living in the nursing home. We took good care of him and his life situation changed for the better and he has been living with us for about seven years. All of these residents and their families are extremely happy with the service we provide to them and are well adjusted to our home/family life, and neighborhood.

In order for us to continue providing the quality of life to these residents, my wife and I have to work very long hours and make ourselves available for 24/7 service and supervision. We also have to hire a relief worker to meet the service needs of these residents and keep the quality of services that we provide to them. Providing this kind of quality service comes with the opportunity costs to us as a family. But we are happy with the service we provide to them. Changing the current rate system to flat rate will significantly impact our ability to continue providing this service. If we are unable to continue providing the level of service to our clients, they don't have any other option but to go back to the group home or nursing home that they came from. This will lead to the same old problem they were facing before moving to a family environment.

I have no doubt that you truly believe that vulnerable adults with disabilities have the right to choose where they live and whom they live with. Neither do I have a doubt that you support programs like family residential homes that change the lives of people with disabilities for better and improve their overall health and happiness. I have a concern that if family providers are not fairly compensated for the hard work they do, they would be forced to close their doors to the people they love to serve which I personally believe will be more expensive to the state. Members of our association do serve diverse clients with diverse needs where the proposed flat rate will not work, and more time is needed to conduct an appropriate study that includes family residential service providers for its potential impacts. We do not agree with the proposed flat rate and ask you to support SF 3841 to delay the implementation of the rate change until Jan 1, 2028. Members of our association want their voice heard and your support is greatly appreciated.

Thank you so much for your service and for the work you do at the legislature and I hope to hear from you about this important matter.

Sincerely,

Gebi Tufaa  
Board Secretary  
Alliance of Family Residential Service Providers