

Senator John Hoffman, Chair
Senator Jim Abeler, Minority Leader
Members of the Human Services Committee
2111 Minnesota State Senate Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

March 18, 2024

Dear Chair Hoffman, Lead Abeler, and Members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

My name is Kelly Friesen, and I am the mother of a 25-year-old named Michael, who lives with Autism. I've had the privilege of serving on the Waiver Reimagine Advisory Committee or WRAC since its formation in 2022. When Michael was diagnosed, he had limited speech & unmanageable behaviors. With the help of the waiver, we have been able to provide him with services, and I am thrilled to say he is now working full-time with support & he is no longer using SSI. I am extremely grateful for the MN wavier system!

If Michael experiences another Mental Health crisis, he may temporarily need corporate or congregate support. I am concerned about the complexity of transitioning between waivers that are based on location and not upon needs. I have heard there is a 10 month back log with MN Choice 2.0. How long will it take for Michael to get help? When he stabilizes, will he be forced to stay in a corporate setting, at higher cost because of the MN Choice backlog? We do not know the answers to these questions, yet Wavier Reimagine continues to move forward.

What about individuals who need 24-hour care and are saving taxpayers money by living in their community homes? What happens when their budget is cut so low, that their services are no longer sustainable? We are told there will be budget exceptions. WRAC members have asked, why are we relying on exceptions?

The **HSRI reports** from 2018 concluded that living in the community costs less than it does in a corporate or congregate care setting. Somehow the data was interpreted to mean that people living in the community should get less money, instead of, we should be doing everything we can to keep people in the Community to save money! Critical feedback may be heard on WRAC, but it is not implemented. My fear is that WRAC is a formality to suggest there was stakeholder involvement.

We owe it to the over 57,000 Minnesotans who rely on waived services to get it right the first time. The solution I am offering is to establish a collaborative decision-making partnership between WRAC members and DHS leadership so we can move Waiver Reimagine in a positive direction that will benefit all.

Respectfully,

Kelly J. Friesen RN, PHN