

March 18, 2024

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

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lauren Thompson, I'm a disabled disability rights advocate. I served on the Waiver Reimagine Advisory Committee, referred to as WRAC. As previously mentioned, Waiver Reimagine needs many improvements, so does the advisory committee itself.

Respectfully, I discuss these issues from my perspective given that my last meeting was in December. I hope that this will lead to genuine collaboration and improvements.

The budget limits already mentioned translate to safety issues for me and people like me. Forcing more people into places like grouphomes takes away rights, hurts the workforce, and it's financially draining. I don't have time to tell you how bad grouphomes are right now.

A significant amount of policy is vague and unclear, and the WRAC meetings felt much the same way.

I assume positive intentions but it's hard when policy gaps could put me in danger and the people in charge haven't made enough time or an appropriate forum to voice concerns.

Also, there is a difference between hearing input and actually empowering people to make decisions.

When I was there, decisions were made about agendas, meeting time, and structure the without committee input. When I left, DHS staff articulated goals for improvements, and I appreciate that.

In my opinion, the best way support WRAC improvements is to change the governing statute to mandate more committee engagement, it's largely nonspecific right now. It's not just about respect, empowering disabled people in policymaking is essential to ensure that it actually works.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Lauren Thompson

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