



Testimony of Katrin Bachmeier Before the Minnesota Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Regarding the Impact of Waiver Reimagine Budget Cuts on Disabled Households

Chairman Hoffman, Ranking Minority Member Senator Abler, and distinguished members of the committee, my name is Katrin Bachmeier, and I am a disability advocate with over 20 years of experience serving the Twin Cities community. As a member liaison through the National Resource Center for Participant-Directed Services and Applied Self-Direction, I have gained expertise in federal policy interpretation regarding self-directed programs on home and community-based waivers.

In addition to being a local advocate and mother, I manage several support groups for thousands of Minnesota participants with disabilities and their family caregivers. Today, I speak not only on behalf of my adult daughter Nyla and my minor disabled children but also for the countless individuals represented in these support groups.

My family has invested significant time and resources into creating a loving and supportive home environment for Nyla, who lives with cerebral palsy and dementia requiring neurobehavioral nursing facility level of care. The Consumer-Directed Community Supports (CDCS) option has been instrumental in providing Nyla with the opportunity to develop independent living skills while remaining connected with her siblings and engaged in our community.

For over two decades, Minnesotans with disabilities and their families have poured their hearts and souls into securing a future for our loved ones by investing in homes, building mother-in-law apartments, or purchasing duplexes or condos. These meticulously crafted long-term care plans

are driven by the heartfelt mission to provide a safe, loving, and stable environment for our disabled family members. However, recent budget cuts under Waiver Reimagine and the revised MnCHOICES 2.0 revision assessment unravel these dreams.

Waiver Reimagine would split up entire households with multiple high needs disabled participants, leading to family fragmentation. This is particularly devastating for households like mine, where multiple participants with complex medical needs that cannot be met by traditional services.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) claims that some outliers may be more severely impacted by Waiver Reimagine, but I strongly disagree. For most participants, forcing them to utilize staffing outside of their budget eliminates the funding flexibility needed to maintain their vital, life-sustaining supports.

The recently introduced MnCHOICES 2.0 revision assessment has proven catastrophic, with many participants reporting more than a 50% reduction in their budgets and staffing, and in some cases, total elimination of services, despite no change in their medical needs or disabilities. These appeals are clogging the appeals courts, leaving the highest-needs participants with a mere fraction of their medically assessed support needs.

Self-direction through CDCS allows participants to set staff wages and attract and retain qualified support staff, making it a life-sustaining program for those whose needs cannot be met by traditional staffing programs.

The proposed Waiver Reimagine budget cuts, combined with the disastrous MnCHOICES 2.0 revision, may be the greatest catastrophe to ever hit Minnesota's disability services program, setting us back 30 years and undermining the ADA Integration Mandates and the Minnesota Olmstead Plan.

Waiver Reimagine siphons funds from the highest-needs, medically complex participants to open up new waivers for those with low Activities of Daily Living (ADL) needs. While addressing homelessness among individuals with criminal records is important, perhaps these funds should come from the Department of Justice? We cannot force the highest-needs, medically complex and high behavioral participants into hospitals and institutions to open up waivers for those with no or low ADL dependencies.

We urge Minnesota to stop utilizing national companies that compile data disconnected from our market rates, local needs, and program dynamics. Instead, please listen to your local constituents living with the day-to-day realities of these services and supports.

Minnesota participants need budgets based on their disabilities, not their location. Cutting participant budgets and forcing them to utilize CFSS supports with a staff wage cap will immediately reduce wages and hours of both participants and direct support staff. This will result in a mass exodus of skilled caregivers and the forced relocation of countless disabled

individuals into provider-owned/managed mini-institutional settings- as defined by the Department of Justice.

It is deeply disheartening for families who have dedicated our lives to providing our disabled loved ones with the best, most integrated, family home placement setting. The dreams of many Minnesota families who built these home placement models are now shattered.

According to the Department of Justice, segregated settings that violate the ADA include congregate settings populated primarily with individuals with disabilities, characterized by regimentation in daily activities, lack of privacy or autonomy, and limits on individuals' ability to engage freely in community activities. It's important to note that a weekly trip to the grocery store does not constitute genuine community integration, yet many provider owned/managed care models can barely accommodate even these minimal outings.

Minnesota has rolled out Waiver Reimagine in several phases, making the impending catastrophe less noticeable. However, upon rollout, the state should be prepared for thousands of Minnesotans to be rushed to emergency rooms as their carefully constructed support systems collapse overnight. There is no cost savings in this approach; in fact, it will lead to ballooning costs as individuals are forced into expensive institutional settings and hospitals.

I implore this committee to place an immediate stay on Waiver Reimagine so that we can fully reevaluate and understand the devastating consequences to participants and their families. Let us rally together to support Minnesota families with disabilities by ensuring adequate funding for both community-based services and provider-owned residential corporate foster settings. These provider-owned settings are already closing down by the dozens, and Waiver Reimagine will further defund them, exacerbating the crisis. We must find a balance that allows for a range of housing and support options to meet the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities, while still promoting community integration and adherence to ADA's Olmstead Integration Mandate. The mandate is not a suggestion. .

I urge state leaders to impose an immediate emergency stay on Waiver Reimagine in its current form. The dreams and futures of Minnesota's disabled citizens and their families are on the line. We must work together to find a path forward that upholds the promise of flexible, person-centered supports and safeguards the fundamental right of all people to live and thrive in the communities of their choosing.

Our loved ones deserve nothing less. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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