

Dear Esteemed Elected Officials.

I am writing to express my strong support for SF 402, the Disability Waiver Rate System (DWRS) adjustment, particularly as it pertains to services for children with autism. This bill has the potential to positively impact not only autistic children but also their caregivers and the professionals who provide them with essential services. I hope to highlight the importance of this adjustment, particularly for East African immigrant communities and other immigrant groups who face unique challenges accessing care and support.

For many immigrant communities, including my family, wage disparities are a significant concern. We see large number of immigrants working in caregiving and support roles for children with autism, yet their wages often do not reflect the demands of the work. This inequity has led to a shortage of qualified professionals and a lack of retention in the caregiving sector. Lower wages also prevent many caregivers from continuing in this vital work, which in turn impacts the quality of services provided to children with autism.

The language used in the DWRS and the gatekeeping that often occurs within the system further complicate access to the services that autistic children need. Immigrant families often face language and cultural barriers when navigating these systems, making it more difficult for them to advocate for their children and access adequate support. As a result, many children in these communities go without the critical services they require to thrive. Delays in rate adjustments are incredibly detrimental to the timely delivery of autism services. When adjustments are delayed or when there are barriers in place, families experience interruptions in services that prevent children from reaching their full potential. These delays are particularly hard on immigrant communities where language and cultural differences further complicate access to the necessary supports. Families who are already marginalized are disproportionately affected, and this perpetuates cycles of inequality in our system.

I have personally assisted East African immigrant community members navigate the Disability Waiver Rate System, and I've seen firsthand how confusing and difficult it is for many to understand the language used and how it differs from the actual services available. The complex terminology and bureaucratic hurdles often make it challenging for these families to access the support their children need. Maangaar Voices has been deeply involved in advocating for better understanding of DWRS, working tirelessly to bridge the gap between the system and the community. By engaging with DHS and raising awareness, we can empower more East African families, encourage community involvement, and foster a more inclusive and accessible system for all.

In my personal experience, I have seen how a rate adjustment can have a profound impact on the ability to provide autistic children with the services and support they deserve. A rate increase is essential for caregiver retention. When support professionals are properly compensated, they are more likely to stay in their positions and provide high-quality care. This benefits the children they support and promotes a more stable and capable workforce within the autism support field. Higher wages can also attract more qualified professionals, helping to close the gap in services and provide greater support to those who need it most.

Increased funding through rate adjustments would also create more opportunities for autistic children to develop greater independence. With the proper resources and services, children can work toward living more fulfilling and independent lives. This benefits not just the children, but the entire community, as the focus shifts from merely providing care to actively fostering growth, skill development, and self-sufficiency.

Therefore, I strongly support SF 402 and urge the lawmakers to recognize the importance of adjusting the Disability Waiver Rate System. This adjustment is critical not only for the children and families directly impacted by autism, but for the support professionals who are essential to delivering the services that create meaningful change in their lives. Moreover, it will promote equity, inclusion, and a more accessible system for everyone, including immigrant communities like mine.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Farhia Said

Neurodivergent Parent/Advocate

Vice Chair of Maangaar Voices