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March 21st, 2025

Re: Support for SF 2796 – Waiver Case Management Rate Increase

Chair Hoffman and Members of the Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express our strong support for SF 2796, which seeks to address the human services workforce crisis by increasing reimbursement rates for waiver case management and establishing a long-term framework for fair compensation and workforce stability.

Meridian Services, Inc. provides waiver case management services to more than 5,500 individuals with disabilities throughout the State of Minnesota. Every day, our 125 case managers help individuals with disabilities access critical services, coordinate care, and advocate for their needs, allowing them to live independently. However, despite the essential nature of this work, reimbursement rates have not increased since 2015, and agencies like ours are struggling to recruit and retain qualified case managers.

The workforce shortage has reached a crisis point. We have had a critical turnover of our staff over the past decade as they have been hired as county / managed care organization or have moved into different areas of work where they can be compensated fairly. The counties and managed care organizations (MCO) can pay an increased salary as well by offering a significantly better benefits package. Many times, our supervisory staff leave our agency for an increased salary, better benefits and without the additional responsibility of supervising staff in their new county/MCO positions. The loss of staff means higher caseloads for the remaining staff and less time for each individual client. It is not uncommon for the people we serve and their families to have 2 or 3 new case managers in one year. High turnover also results in an increase in training time and costs for our agency. Without action, the situation will continue to worsen, leaving people with disabilities without the consistent, high-quality case management support they need.

SF 2796 takes essential steps to stabilize the waiver case management workforce by:

- Increasing reimbursement rates to help agencies offer competitive wages and retain skilled professionals.
- Requiring an annual labor market analysis to ensure rates reflect real workforce conditions.
- Establishing a structured review process to prevent future stagnation in funding.

These changes will help address workforce shortages, reduce service disruptions, and ensure that people with disabilities receive the high-quality case management they deserve. Case managers ensure state disability funds are used effectively, and investing in this workforce now will prevent higher costs down the road.

Failing to act means more case managers leaving the field, more families struggling to navigate complex systems alone, and more Minnesotans with disabilities losing access to vital supports. By passing SF 2796, Minnesota can make a much-needed investment in the stability and well-being of both case managers and the people they serve.

We urge you to support this critical legislation. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to strengthening Minnesota's human services workforce. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions at 612-239-4615 or lthompson@orionassoc.net.

Sincerely,

Leann Thompson.

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