



Chair Champion and Members of the Senate Jobs and Economic Development Committee,

On behalf of the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees (MAPE) — a union representing over 18,500 state workers across all Minnesota's agencies, boards and commissions — we thank you for including the operating adjustments for the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and Explore Minnesota, as well as for including funding for Vocational Rehabilitation Services at DEED.

Operating adjustments ensure that agencies can maintain service levels and retain experienced staff who operate and oversee important programs created by the legislature. Continuation of these programs at the same service levels as previous years is not possible without addressing the inflationary costs of an agency. Because these investments are so important, we urge you to consider additional funding for the Vocational Rehabilitation Services program at DEED. The mission of the VRS program is to empower Minnesotans with disabilities to achieve their goals for employment, independent living and community integration by offering training and obtaining workplace accommodations. When people with disabilities get the support they need, they can obtain meaningful employment to the benefit of our communities and our economy.

DEED plans to lay off dozens of vocational rehabilitation counselors, which will leave hundreds of participants without a designated counselor to help them. While the appropriation of two million dollars per biennium reflected in your budget bill is appreciated, it will not mitigate the majority of the negative impacts on the VRS program. The governor's revised budget allocates ten million dollars per biennium from the Workforce Development Fund to maintain this important program. As this bill moves forward, we urge the committee to match or exceed the amount recommended by the governor.

Sincerely,

Sydney Spreck
Political Affairs Coordinator

Minnesota Association of Professional Employees (MAPE)