



May 9, 2022

Members of the Health and Human Services Conference Committee,

My name is Julie Johnson, and I am the President of MSS - an organization that provides employment and day support services to people with disabilities. I am also the President of MOHR, a statewide association of over 100 organizations providing employment and day support services to Minnesotans with disabilities. MOHR understands that the Health and Human Services Conference Committee is being asked to address several very important needs this session, given how destabilizing COVID and the workforce shortage have been for several critical human services. With that understanding, we strongly urge the following provisions be included in the final conference committee report to better support Minnesotans with disabilities.

First, given the current dire shortage of staff in the area of waiver-funded disability services, we strongly urge the Conference Committee to include investments in the wages of these staff. Past investments in the rates for waiver-funded disability services have been greatly appreciated. However, because those scheduled adjustments are based on significantly outdated data, the reality is that the current state set rates are not allowing for staff wages and benefits that are competitive. As a result, people with disabilities across the state are facing more and more barriers in access to waiver-funded disability services. Across the state, employment and day support programs for people with disabilities have growing waiting lists of Minnesotans with disabilities wishing to access employment and day support services for the first time or return post COVID for whom providers cannot find staff. This is at the same time that some group homes are closing, and services to people living independently are becoming more and more limited. The Senate HHS Omnibus bill contains **long-term investments in the wages and benefits for staff working in waiver-funded disability services, while the House does not. This investment is vital to the lives of people with disabilities and MOHR strongly urges for it to be included in the final conference committee report.**

Second, both the House and Senate Omnibus bills contain the proposal to update the wage data informing the Employment Exploration reimbursement rate. While a relatively small proposal with a very low cost, this proposal will help to increase access to this service focused on helping people with disabilities understand and gain exposure to competitive, integrated employment options. **MOHR strongly supports this Employment Exploration provision in both the House and Senate HHS Omnibus bill and urges for it to be included in the final conference committee report.**

The current state surplus presents an opportunity for legislators to address multiple critical HHS needs, including those across the disability services spectrum. If legislators don't address the outdated reimbursement rates for waiver-funded disability services, the ongoing lack of access to these services will continue to have negative impacts on people's mental health and well-being.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Julie Johnson'.

Julie Johnson | MOHR President | MSS President | jjohnson@mssmn.org