



Subject: Best Life Alliance

Dear Chair Noor and Members of the Human Services Finance Committee,

My name is Brett McLean and for over two decades I have assisted Minnesotans with physical, developmental, or mental health limitations to live as independently as possible. I've worked nearly every role in the industry from Caregiver to my current role as Program Director at Midwest Independent Living Services, LLC, which I've held for the past 10 years.

I wish to share with the Committee that the last 2 years have been the most difficult of my career. Of course, we had the pandemic that was "unprecedented," but now the newest, and arguably most difficult barrier is the serious lack of employees for Waiver-Funded Disability Services Providers caused by the pay increases to low-earning jobs.

Due to providers' reliance on the Disability Waiver Rate System (DWRS), waiver-funded providers are unable to independently increase the rates for services necessary to compete in this current job market. Our competitors, on the other hand, like chain restaurants, large commercial employers, and other employers of less skilled workers *can* independently increase prices to respond to the increased cost of materials, services, and labor. This ability to counter current market conditions makes these industries economically agile as well as attractive to prospective employees.

In addition, another obstacle DWRS presents to agencies is that *it uses data from two years earlier*. This means even when rates refresh the amount at which they refresh *is still outdated*. The reality agencies will face, unless action is taken, is that employee compensation will still fall short of what market conditions are demanding and employee shortages will continue. In turn, this will limit the support agencies like ours can provide for some of Minnesota's most vulnerable citizens.

As my legislator, I am asking you to support the major DWRS rate increase because, without this, waiver-funded providers will continue to struggle to secure staffing due to inadequate and outdated compensation. Please work with ARRM and support the Best Life Alliance Legislation.

Please join me in advocating for the funding necessary to support Minnesotans with disabilities to live their best, most self-direct lives.

Brett McLean
Midwest Independent Living Services, LLC
Program Director