

House Human Services Finance & Policy Committee

Thursday, February 11, 2021

H.F. 296 Letter of Support



Madam Chair and members,

On behalf of The Arc Minnesota, thank you for hearing Rep. Noor's House File 296 during your Human Services Finance & Policy Committee meeting today.

In 1988, the Minnesota Legislature authorized the Department of Human Services to implement the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act, otherwise known as TEFRA – which provides access to Medicaid (or Medical Assistance) state plan services for children who have disabilities whose parents' income is higher than our state's Medical Assistance income eligibility limit.

State plan services frequently accessed by families of children who have disabilities through MA-TEFRA include home care and Personal Care Assistance, medical equipment and supplies, hospital services, and even eyeglasses or hearing aids.

Families can also access more intensive, long-term services and supports through our four disability waivers. Having access to state plan and waiver services is critically important, because they help children who have disabilities live at home with their families, access supports in their communities, attend school with their peers, and avoid more restrictive and costly interventions in institutional settings. These options ensure that children can live, learn, and play in their communities.

Parents accessing state plan services through MA-TEFRA and Home & Community Based Service waivers for their children who have disabilities have been subjected to a sliding-scale parental fee since 1990. These parental fees skyrocketed in the 2000s as the state scrambled to recover from a significant budget deficit – nearly doubling without any change in family income.

Over time, parents and advocates have worked with elected officials such as yourselves to incrementally lower these parental fees – even securing a reduction as recently as 2019. However, we know that families statewide are still struggling to cover the cost of these fees – just to access the services, supports, and therapies that help their children live and thrive.

For some, their monthly fees equal the mortgage payment on their home. Others are forced to drain their savings, going deep into debt in order to cover the fees. On an almost-monthly basis, parents are forced to make an impossible choice between accessing the needed services and supports for their child, or living with the added financial hardship of a parental fee.

Do they pay their mortgage or the parental fee? Do they fix a broken water heater, get maintenance or repairs on their vehicle, or pay the parental fee?

As advocates, the most heartbreaking stories we hear come from families who are forced to forego the critical services and supports their child depends on because they simply cannot afford the fee.

As a state, we cannot afford for children who have disabilities or medical complexities to miss out on therapies and supports during the most critical developmental periods of their lives; this creates more pressure on special education services in the school system, increases costly crisis interventions and hospitalizations, and dependence on home & community based services into adulthood.

House Human Services Finance & Policy Committee

Thursday, February 11, 2021

H.F. 296 Letter of Support

On behalf of our statewide team and the many parent advocates supporting this proposal, thank you to Rep. Noor for being the lead author of House File 296 this year. We urge the committee to lend your support for eliminating parental fees, so all Minnesota children who have disabilities get the care and supports they need to build a foundation for success.

Thank you.

Alicia Munson

Chief Program Officer

The Arc Minnesota

aliciamunson@arcminnesota.org

612.242.5333