Chair Noor and the Members of the Human Services Finance Committee;

I’m writing to ask you to help our most vulnerable Minnesota community members, citizens with disabilities. I work with Thomas Allen, a company that supports individuals with developmental or physical disabilities who often have complex care needs for their medical or mental health needs. These are individuals who wouldn’t be able to live independently without support. Our residential division supports vulnerable people to live in their own homes as independently as possible. When a person needs more help, we have community residential services where a person can live with others and receive supervision and care 24 hours a day.

We desperately need your help to continue to support these Minnesotans. We’re struggling to find people to hire and stay on to help support those who receive services. During the pandemic’s beginning, many people worked, despite the risks. As the pandemic continued and inflation increased, many people left the company for other fields that are easier, less stressful and demanding, and can afford to pay more. The loss of employees and the inability to recruit more has caused permanent service termination for some individuals and the closure of multiple CRS homes. The company has supported these people for over 20 years but can’t continue solely because we can’t recruit staff at the pay and service level we’re approved for. This causes people to fail to live in their own homes or a CRS as their least intensive setting. They still need assistance, but where do they go? They could go to a more intensive setting, such as a hospital or nursing home, but only if room is available and at a significantly higher cost. They can’t even rely on the state-operated homes as they have been packed and have refused to support them. What do we do when the emergency safety net is broken?

We still have regular service inquiries but cannot start services without recruiting and training more staff. People need services and have requested to be on our waitlist. Some of those waitlists have people waiting for more than two years. Several people or their representatives contact us monthly, asking if there have been updates or openings because they have such a need.

We have tried alternatives, such as adaptive technology, to help provide support to some individuals. However, we find obstacles to that alternative. For example, we had an individual who could benefit from a combination of remote and in-person monitoring with some adaptive technology. We got an assessment quickly, and the case manager submitted the proposals in early July 2022. However, we are still waiting for the committee to review the submission. Because of this delay, we are looking at alternatives to support this individual or the path of service termination.

People who want to work with people, our most vulnerable Minnesotans, deserve to be paid a living wage for what they do. The people we support deserve regular employees who support them and have a good work/life balance. We cannot continue with how we’ve operated in the past. We cannot continue to fail these people in need. So please, help these vulnerable people live with dignity and provide long-term investment and funding to continue valuable services.

Thank you for your time and dedication to the citizens of Minnesota,

Susan Pagnac

Senior Program Director, Thomas Allen