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**Chair Noor and Members of the Human Service Finance Committee,**

This letter is sent to support the Best Life Alliance legislation which makes long-term sustainable investments in the DWRS rates. Without these investments to address the workforce crisis, the crumbling we are seeing in community disability services now will soon lead to a collapse of the system.

RSI supports people with disabilities and people with mental illness in East-central and Northeastern Minnesota. If we were fully staffed, RSI would have 600 employees. Currently we have 450 employees. Our vacancy rate for DSP positions is at 31%. The impacts from this level of vacancy rates are proving to be unsustainable.

Right now, RSI’s services and the entire disability system is being supported by very committed DSPs who are going above and beyond to help cover shifts. They are working 70 plus hours a week and often must fill back-to-back shifts. Additionally, frontline supervisors are also working overtime to cover direct care shifts. Even this effort leaves many shifts open that are being filled by management staff. The stress and strain from trying to maintain this effort is costing RSI the loss of experienced and valuable employees who cannot continue working under these circumstances.

Imagine being a DSP who is supposed to report to work for a shift but knows the next shift is open on the schedule. This person knows they cannot leave the people in the program alone at the end of their shift, so they expect to be mandated to stay on the extra shift. They are faced with rearranging childcare and canceling personal activities if they come to work and get mandated to stay an extra shift. It must be very tempting to call-in to work and not fill their shift when the next shift is open. When that happens, and it happens way too often, imagine what it is like to be the person who is working the previous shift and now has two open shifts behind them.

The circumstances described above are happening every day. This is just a part of the toll being experienced by DSPs. The effects of the workforce crisis certainly don’t stop with employees. The people we serve, who depend on the care and support of DSPs, are living with the daily stress they see in their staff and with their own concerns about their home being closed due to a lack of staff. This is a very real concern. RSI is one of many providers who has had to close homes.

Without additional investments in DWRS, the disability services system is going to collapse. The impacts of this happening will cost much more than the needed investment. The legislature’s failure to pass funding last year has led to the system weakening a great deal. The problem cannot be ignored without very serious implications for people with disabilities. Please act on this legislation.

Jon Nelson

Executive Director, RSI