Chair Mohamed Noor and Members of the Human Services Finance Committee

Subject: Letter of Support for HF 1434/SF1201

I am writing to you as a parent of a child with a disability and a participant in the TEFRA program. Our family are residents of Albany, Minnesota in Stearns County.

Our family is personally affected by the hefty parental fees that come with participating in TEFRA since 2019. The parental fees for TEFRA are devasting and I feel our family is being punished for bringing a beautiful human being into this world who has a very rare genetic condition that hinders his abilities in various ways.

The monthly TEFRA parental fees have touched my family in many ways. Our family has had to make difficult financial choices and decisions to be able to afford these fees. Our family has not been able to provide my son with a wheelchair accessible van because the funds need to go to parental fees. In November 2022, I had to personally turndown a promotion at my place of employment because I knew it only meant higher TEFRA parental fees. I waited for this position for SEVEN years and I finally was chosen, it was heart breaking for me to have to choose between my successful dream career I have spent years preparing for OR remain in my current position in fear my parental fees would skyrocket- *just* to ensure my son has adequate healthcare coverage, care support and the equipment he needs. My husband and I have been trying to better our families futures by perusing promotions and furthering our education, advancing our careers but are stopped dead in our tracks knowing that *we* don’t get the extra funds we are earning. A vast majority of our promotional increases and advancements will go to increased parental fees. We feel the better you do with your career, the further you get penalized.

Families with parental fees are being **punished**. Its like we ‘did something wrong’. Like we have a monthly fine we have to pay to access BASIC necessities and accommodations to our child(ren). We didn’t choose this lifestyle, I promise. We didn’t choose to have our children have disabilities and limitations. We have been wanting to build a home to accommodate to my sons wheelchair and equipment in the home and promote his independence to his highest potential, but he is being robbed from that because unfortunately the parental fees have to come first. He isn’t able to use his wheelchair or walker in our current home which is hindering his progression of independence. Now **HE** is being punished and robbed of his potential abilities because the money must go to our parental fees instead of building a home to accommodate. We have had to borrow money from family to help pay for other necessities for our family because again, our money is going to parental fees every single month. Even in tough economic times like right now with inflation, gas prices rising, groceries rising, medical care rising, medications rising. I assure you that we are not taking annual trips to Florida or Mexico, we don’t have the latest and greatest technology gadgets or the 65+ inch screen TV. We don’t have brand new vehicles off the lot. We don’t have campers, boats, fish houses, four-wheelers. We spent very well within our means and still struggle monthly to pay our monthly “punishment fee” for having a child born with a genetic condition that is entirely out of our families control.

I am pleading for legislators to help support families like ours who struggle every month to pay these outrageous parental fees. This isn’t like a mortgage we signed up for KNOWING what the monthly price would be. This is every day people trying to start a family and raise our children to the best of our ability who feel threatened by parental fees, in addition to the premiums we pay for health insurance through our employer. After all that said, IF I would quit my job (that I spent thousands and thousands of dollars on obtaining an education to qualify for), our parental fee would VANISH! It is like we are encouraged to take the route that contains the least effort.

* ***WORK HARDER= PENALIZED HARDER***
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At the end of the day, PLEASE, take into consideration. Families are just trying their best, every single day, to help, love, accommodate to our children with disabilities. We are often in survival mode and taking on thousands and thousands (and thousands) of dollars so my son has medical care and services he requires is so upsetting and baffles me beyond words.

My last ask, is please, take a moment to put yourself in this situation. You are blessed with a beautiful baby and they have a rare genetic disorder. You adapt, you change, you process all that needs to happen. The medications they need, the insurance they need, the housing, the equipment, the care, the IEPs, the appointments, the therapies, the physical and emotional toll it takes—and surprise, you now owe THOUSANDS of dollars for healthcare needs and access to programs these children NEED.

Please consider eliminating this TEFRA fee to help give families a much needed financial break!

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Kristi Kurtz

Albany, Minnesota

District 13A