

Dear Members of the Omnibus Human Services Finance Bill Conference Committee,

I am the owner and Director of Homecare with NextStep Homecare, Inc. located in Alexandria, MN. I started this homecare agency in 2016 and have survived many ups and downs thrown our direction. We provide home care nursing services to pediatrics and adults in a 8-county territory. We currently serve 17 clients receiving home care nursing services. Our clients have high medical needs and if they are hospitalized, they would be in the ICU or NICU units. With having nursing services in place, we are able to care for their needs at home with avoiding the hospital stays. We are currently caring for a 2-year-old that is needing a chemotherapy medication via IV infusion. We were able to bring this client home to complete his 3x/week infusion versus staying in the hospital an additional 3 weeks to complete his therapy regimen.

I greatly appreciate the investments both the House and Senate propose for home care services, specifically the proposals for increased investments in Homemaker services (across the Elderly and Disability Waivers), home health and home care nursing, and the Personal Care Assistance program. These investments are significant steps forward in addressing the foundational reimbursement rate challenges that are so significantly impacting access to needed home care services for Minnesotans. Specifically, I urge the conference committee to adopt the Senate position on the proposed investments for home health and home care nursing. We also greatly appreciate the significant investment proposed by the House and Senate for the Personal Care Assistance program, however we do need to express again how critical it is that those proposed investments are raised to a level sufficient to cover the SEIU contract requirements.

We currently struggle with finding enough nurses to care for our clients. We are a small agency with only 35 employees based on the reimbursement rate we receive from the State of MN, we are limited on the hourly wage we can offer our employees. We have interviewed nurses who would be a great fit, but when we state what their hourly wage would be they refuse to accept the position. The nurses we are interviewing our asking for a wage that is greater than the hourly rate of reimbursement. If we were to offer the hourly wage these nurses are requesting, we would have to close our doors and be unable to provide care to our high acuity clients. I currently have 8 full-time nurse positions open that have been vacant for over a year. I currently have 3 clients waiting for us to find nurses to cover their 24-hour nursing care. I turn down at least one client a week who is looking for home care nursing services.

With having 8 open positions, our scheduling is very tight. We have had to rely on family members to cover the shifts we were once able to cover. We have family members that are getting exhausted covering up to 5 nights a week, if these family members are no longer able to care for their loved one, we will be forced to have the client hospitalized to receive the care they require. We work really hard to prevent hospitalizations, but this is getting harder and harder to achieve. We are asking for the legislators to increase the base rate for home care nursing to allow us to pay our nurses a higher wage and be more competitive with larger medical facilities in our communities.

I am asking for your support of MHCA's legislation to increase the base rate for home care services so we can ensure that Minnesotans and those with disabilities and complex health needs can remain living independently in their home or with their families. By doing so, they will avoid needing to access more intensive and expensive services.

Feel free to reach out to me if you have questions about the challenges we are facing. I can be reached at tonidiede@nextstephomecare.org.

Sincerely,

Toni Diede
NextStep Homecare, Inc.

