

Chair Noor and committee members,

My name is Robert Wagner and I have worked on behalf of and with people with disabilities for the past four decades. Currently, I am a semi working psychologist. Also, as a volunteer I serve on the Minnesota Coalition Citizens with Disabilities Board (MNCCD) as well as The Arc Minnesota's public policy committee. HF 240 is a priority for both of these organizations.

Previously, I worked as a supervisor and interim manager at Ramsey County's disability services for nearly two decades. In that role, I saw the struggles people have in getting as well as retaining quality caregivers. Personally, I live with a spinal cord injury and know that struggle well too! I have significant support needs and am grateful for a committed and skilled spouse. She's unpaid but the quality of my life as well my very life depends on her support. The last two years have been an incredible struggle to find Personal Care Assistants (PCAs). Because I use a Consumer Directed Community Supports (CDCS) option, it's never been a real problem in the past. Now, even though I pay a higher wage, it's a real problem.

I strongly support HF 240 because of the dire need that my fellow Minnesotans face to find and retain quality PCAs. In my opinion, using family members to help individuals with disabilities as a partial "fix" during this challenging time is a no-brainer. The problem may be multicausal, but as part of the fix, this is pretty simple. Family members are committed, experienced and caring. At this time especially, why wouldn't we lift the 40 hour cap?

Finally, it's a matter of fairness. Why would we penalize individuals with disabilities as well as their family members simply because they're related? I think it's discriminatory, shortsighted and arbitrary!

Please hear our plea: lift the 40 hour restriction for family members. Some things are complex, this is simple, and you have not only the opportunity but the obligation to help people not only thrive but also survive. Personally, I know individuals who cannot maintain a job simply because they don't have reliable caregivers. Family members are reliable and ready to fill the need, just as my wife does when we don't have somebody to help me get out of bed, dress and eat so that I can go to work.

Sincerely and emphatically,

Robert M Wagner LP