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May 2, 2023

**TO:** Chair Hoffman and Noor  
Senators Fateh, and Abeler and Representatives Fischer and Baker

**Re: Human Services Omnibus Bill (HF 2847)**

Dear Chairs Hoffman and Noor and Conference Committee Members:

On behalf of AARP's 620,000 members and all older Minnesotans, we appreciate the opportunity to provide our comments on (HF 2847). AARP appreciates the attention paid to addressing the crisis in the long-term care workforce and investments in senior programs to help seniors age in place, including the Live Well at Home grants, senior nutrition, and the Age-Friendly Council.

While both bills fund these initiatives, they do so at varying levels, and we urge policymakers to come together to support these initiatives with significant resources.

**We respectfully submit the following comments on the Omnibus Health and Human Services bills:**

**Investments in Home and Community-Based Services Rates (House Position)**

AARP supports the historic investments in the House bill that keep people in their homes and communities. This includes rate increases for the Elderly Waiver (EW); Alternative Care (AC); Essential Community Support Programs (ESC), and Consumer First Services and Supports (CFFS) programs.

The new funding will undoubtedly address the gravity of the workforce shortage crisis in these settings and put Medicaid's long-term spending in line with people's priorities for independence.

**Expansion of the Live Well at Home Grants (Senate Position)**

AARP supports the funding level and extension of the Live Well Grant in the Senate bill. Live Well at Home Grants provide services such as chores, transportation, and respite care for seniors who are not eligible for Medicaid services or experience gaps in their funding levels from public programs.

This low-cost, high-impact program uses volunteers to offer critical services that can alleviate the workforce crisis and prevent the need for Medicaid services altogether. A key to restructuring the program is to extend the grants beyond the "one-year" length and eliminate the "innovation" design to

build provider capacity throughout the state, particularly in rural and hard-to-serve areas. In the last few years, providers have had to close their doors in Southeast Minnesota.

### **Extension of the Age-Friendly Council (House Position)**

As Minnesota surpasses one million older adults this year, AARP urges conferees to adopt the House position, which includes the Governor's proposal to extend the Age-Friendly Council through June 30, 2027, to continue the work of Minnesota's entry into the World Health Organization's Age-friendly Network of States and Communities.

AARP also supports extending important funding for small community and technical assistance grants to counties, tribal nations, and community organizations seeking to become Age-Friendly Communities. The Age-Friendly Council ensures our state plans for the rapidly aging demographic shift.

### **Senior Hunger (Senate Position)**

AARP supports the increased funding for the senior nutrition program in the Senate bill. This funding would reduce food insecurity and poverty and improve health outcomes, including reduced hospitalizations among low-income older adults. New state funding is needed to address food security for older Minnesotans, including for aging Black and Hispanic households and rising food costs due to inflation. This funding should be included in the base as the need will increase for many years with the exponential growth of the older adult population.

## **AARP Support for Other Aging-Related Provisions:**

### **Increased Rates for Consumer Directed Supports (Senate Position)**

We support the Senate position, which provides an increase for the Consumer Directed Community Supports (CDCS) option under the EW Waiver program and for providing parity between CDCS and other waiver services to make it more appealing for people to use this option. This program is vital in allowing older adults to hire family and friends rather than relying solely on the direct care workforce, which can help alleviate the workforce shortage crisis.

### **Expedited Access to Home and Community-Based Services (Known as Presumptive Eligibility) (House Position)**

AARP supports the House position, which includes a study to expedite access to home and community-based services known as presumptive eligibility. However, we urge conferees to shorten the timeframe when the study is to be completed. This provision can help older Minnesotans and people with disabilities to start receiving services in their homes when needed and avoid unnecessary admissions to nursing homes and lengthy hospital stays.

### **MA Income Limit Increase and Paid Hour Limits for Spouse (Senate Position)**

AARP supports lifting the cap beyond 40 hours a week for spouses to care for their loved ones under the CFSS (Community First Services and Supports) and the CDCS (Consumer Directed Community Support) programs. We also support increasing the Medical Assistance limit so that individuals have more money to pay for necessities such as rent and food.

### **Investments in the Nursing Home Workforce**

#### **(Senate Position with assurances that funding is tied to workers' wages)**

AARP supports investments to designate certain nursing facilities as critical access facilities in both bills and supports the Senate's position to increase funding for the workforce. However, any new investments should be tied directly to workers' wages, quality outcomes, and accountability measures

to taxpayers. This will go a long way in helping to recruit and retain dedicated, hard-working individuals in these facilities.

Thank you again for your work on this critical bill and the significant investments in home and community-based programs, senior programs, and critical nursing home funding. AARP looks forward to working with lawmakers to pass a strong conference report. If you have questions or wish to discuss this matter further, please contact AARP Advocacy's Director, Mary Jo George, at [mgeorge@aarp.org](mailto:mgeorge@aarp.org) or 651-271-6586.

Sincerely,



Cathy McLeer  
State Director  
AARP Minnesota