

May 1, 2023

Dear Chair Noor, Chair Hoffman, and Members of the Human Services Conference Committee:

On behalf of all residents of Ramsey County I want to thank you for your efforts to create a human services system that works for all Minnesotans. There is a lot to like in these bills and as you work together to craft the omnibus package I wanted to connect and share Ramsey County's thoughts on a few items.

DHS Technology Funding

We appreciate the recognition of the need to address the outdated technology currently used by counties and DHS to support critical human services programs. One-time surplus dollars are a perfect opportunity to make investments in technology that will pay dividends into the future. We support the appropriations in the Governor's budget to address METS, MMIS, HMIS, SSIS, MAXIS, and MEC2 systems. Updating these systems will not only improve services for Minnesota residents, it will also improve our ability to retain our workforce by removing the need for employees work with clunky, outdated systems that are often older than our workers are.

In addition, it is essential that the state work with the counties in partnership to co-create these technology solutions to ensure that they will work for both the county workers and the people served. As primary users and with firsthand knowledge of their impact on our residents, counties' perspective is needed to work collaboratively with the state to modernize and build the future human services ecosystem. Additionally, there will be a need for modifications to county-provided technology that complement and depend on these systems. Therefore, I ask that investments at the state level be paired with investments at the county level.

Mentally Ill and Dangerous Funding

Ramsey County appreciates the Senate provision funding 50% of the current cost share that counties pay for individuals who are civilly committed and moving between state-operated facilities. Counties do not have control over this movement and appreciate the consideration of funding a portion of these costs. High acuity placements are an important topic, and we are ready to work on policy modifications and meaningful investments that can support our broken continuum of care so that it can better serve all communities.

Workforce

I am also pleased to see the high number of provisions in the House and Senate bills related to workforce, including Disability Waiver Rate System (DWRS) adjustments, ICF rate floor increases, long-term care workforce grants for New Americans, BI and CADI customized living rate increases, home-and-community based grants, and provider capacity grants that will help maintain and grow our critical caring profession workforce. Working directly to connect individuals in need of disability services or long-term care, Ramsey County is very aware of the staffing shortages and strains on providers who are bound by rigid state reimbursements. Thank you for your investments to support this key piece of our human services system.

Subminimum Wage Elimination

Finally, I am pleased to express Ramsey County’s support for the phased elimination of the use of subminimum wage for people with disabilities in Minnesota. Ramsey County made the move to eliminate paying people with disabilities less than minimum wage approximately five years ago, and we have seen the positive impacts that such a move brings to an entire organization. This policy change is important and absolutely the right thing to do. While legitimate issues remain around fully ensuring services and supports for all Minnesotans – and particularly those living with a disability – those issues should not impede progress toward ensuring dignified, fully compensated employment for everyone. I hope the legislature will join Ramsey County in creating a future without a subminimum wage for people with disabilities in Minnesota.

Thank you again for your work in service to the State of Minnesota. In the days ahead please feel free to reach out to us with any questions you may have or to ask for any assistance you may need. Your work is critical to the well-being of all Minnesotans, and we are proud to be your partner in these efforts.

Thank you,



Commissioner Trista MatasCastillo
Ramsey County Board Chair
Ramsey County Legislative Committee Chair



Commissioner Rena Moran
Ramsey County Commissioner, District 4
Ramsey County Legislative Committee Vice Chair

Cc: Governor Tim Walz, Speaker Melissa Hortman, Majority Leader Kari Dziedzic