

April 28, 2023

Rep. Noor  
Rep. Fischer  
Rep. Baker  
Sen. Hoffman  
Sen. Abeler  
Sen. Fateh

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

As Co-CEOs of Opportunity Partners, a Twin Cities nonprofit organization serving 1,200 adults with disabilities, we would like to **thank both the House and Senate for your proposed investments in the Disability Waiver Rate System**. If passed, these investments will allow for much-needed increases in direct support worker wages and benefits. Fixing reimbursement rate challenges is foundational to addressing the current extremely destabilizing workforce shortage in waiver-funded disability services, and we thank you for recognizing this.

We urge the conference committee to adopt the Senate level of funding for DWRS. Specifically, we ask you to support the following (Senate position is the language found in SF2934 3rd Engrossment and House position is the language found in SF2924 2nd Unofficial Engrossment):

- Senate position proposing to fully fund the Competitive Workforce Factor, Article 1, Section 33, beginning at line 46.18.
- Senate position proposing to adjust the SOC codes for Employment Exploration services, lines 43.20 through 43.23.
- Joint House/Senate position proposing to move the next rate adjustment up to January of 2024 and every subsequent two years, lines 41.15 through 41.17 of the House position and line 41.25 of the Senate position.
- House position proposing to change the date of the data used for future adjustments to March, 22 months prior to the adjustment, lines 41.16 and 41.18 through 41.19 of the House position.

At Opportunity Partners, the workforce shortage has resulted in 350 people with disabilities on our wait list for day and employment services. Of those, 133 are people who are still waiting to return since the COVID-19 shutdown. In addition, we were forced to temporarily close 3 group homes due to an inability to provide adequate staffing. The investments outlined above will allow for wage and benefit increases that will help ease this devastating workforce crisis that is leaving many families with no service options for their loved ones.

Thank you again for proposing significant investments in the DWRS system to allow for needed increases in the wages and benefits of Direct Support Professionals. Meaningful legislative action is needed this session to better support Minnesotans with disabilities to live connected and engaged lives.

Sincerely,

Bill Schultz  
President & CEO, Operations & Strategy

Lori Schluttenhofer  
President & CEO, Services