



May 6, 2021

To: Senate and House Health and Human Services Conference Committee Members

RE: HF 2128/SF 2360

Dear Chair Benson, Chair Abeler, Senator Utke, Senator Koran, Senator Hoffman, Chair Liebling, Chair Schultz, Chair Pinto, Chair Gomez, and Representative Schomacker,

Thank you so much for your work on the Health and Human Services Conference Committee. We are so grateful for your work on this important part of our state budget.

We write as the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MNCCD). MNCCD is a broad coalition of over 30 advocacy organizations and providers—as well as individuals who have disabilities—working to address public policy issues by collaborating, advocating, educating, influencing change, and creating awareness. We write to share feedback on the Senate and House Health and Human Services Finance omnibus bills. We are grateful for the work of both the Senate and the House on these important bills and for the inclusion of many provisions from MNCCD's 2021 policy priorities.

At this juncture, we believe that ensuring that people who have disabilities can make informed choices about where they live and work, and have access to meaningful options for doing so, is of utmost priority for our state. Minnesotans who have disabilities bring incredible gifts to our communities across the state and deserve the support they might need to live and work in the homes and communities that they choose. You have the opportunity this session to take two tremendous steps to support the empowerment of people who have disabilities to live and work in the communities they choose.

Critical Investments in PCA services (Senate Article 14, Section 75; House Article 14, Sections 30, 38)

First, making long overdue, systemic and sustaining investments in the Personal Care Assistance (PCA) program is a necessary step to ensure that people who access PCA services can find that support, and that that valuable workforce is compensated with a livable wage. We urge you to adopt significant rate increases for the PCA program and to ratify the Service Employees International Union collective bargaining agreement (House-only provision at Article 14, Section 38). A rate increase alone will not sustain the needed structural investments this program desperately requires. In upcoming negotiations, we urge you to prioritize the PCA rate framework included in the House's omnibus bill, to ensure that PCA rates achieve parity with rates for other long-term services and supports and are more sustainable long-term (House-only provision at Article 14, Section 30).

Supporting informed choice (Senate Article 14, Sections 12, 26-34)

Second, we urge you to adopt language changes from the Senate bill that would ensure that people who access Home and Community Based Services are offered informed choice about the options for where they live, where they work, how they direct their services, and the technology supports they use (Senate-only at Article 14, Sections 12, 26-34). This language was developed by stakeholders statewide,

including people who have disabilities, and centers individuals' choice and autonomy. It also makes way for needed changes in our service systems towards supporting people to live in their own homes and work in jobs they choose. Having access to robust information about a range of formal and informal support options directly impacts the choices people are able to make.

There are several other provisions in the Senate and House bills that we support, and we hope you will include them in your final conference committee report:

Provisions of support in the Senate bill:

- HCBS Hospitalization Study (Article 14, Section 68)
- Reinstating Community Access for the PCA Program Study (Article 14, Section 69)
- Relief for families who pay parental fees. We appreciate the language included in the Senate bill (Article 9, Sections 2-3). Any reduction or elimination of these fees would be helpful for families.

Provisions of support in both the House and Senate bill:

- Inclusive Child Care (Senate Article 19, Section 8; House Article 16, Section 16)
- Extension of temporary PCA payment for parents and spouses (Senate Article 19, Section 72; House Article 14, Section 42)

Provisions of concern:

- Senate: County Waiver Allocation Growth Limits (Article 19, Section 73). We are concerned that these provisions would change the current structure of waiver funding and limit options for access to community for people not yet receiving needed waived services. We are also concerned about the impact the proposed changes will have on needed services for current waiver recipients.
- House: Nonemergency Medical Transportation (Article 1, Sections 6, 14, 15, 28, 29, 31). We are concerned that these changes, including the projected savings, could result in limited access to needed transportation services for people who have disabilities across the state.

We also had significant concerns about the proposal related to rate changes for Durable Medical Equipment and are grateful to both bodies for not including this provision in your final omnibuses.

Thank you so much for your work on the conference committee. We appreciate this opportunity to share our views. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Haley & Maren Hulden
MNCCD Policy Co-Chairs