

Testimony for House Committee On Human Services Finance and Policy  
For Thursday, March 17, 2022

Re: HF3896, Task Force on Disability Services Accessibility and Pilot Project Established

Chair Schultz & Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony. My name is Jean Bender; my son, David, is a 35-year-old man with multiple disabilities who requires 24-hour care and assistance with all activities of daily living. He has been receiving services through our county human services programs since he was three years old.

I support HF 3896 because our disability service system is broken. Unfortunately, even as a parent advocate for 35 years, an early intervention provider for 15 years, and an English-speaking, college-educated, system savvy, middle-class, privileged person, I have sometimes struggled to maintain his eligibility for services and obtain the specific services David needs. Some of the most egregious examples follow.

Several times, we have received mail backdated 30 days or more from the date postmarked. A few times, the letters inside indicate that David's services will be discontinued (within days of receipt of the letter) if we don't submit x, y, or z paperwork that we have records indicating were sent well before the due date. After calling in a panic, multiple times on multiple days in order to get a response (often having to call up the chain of command to department supervisors), we are told that we shouldn't worry, the paperwork was received, and the letter was computer-generated. Keep in mind, that I have the ability to open, read, and respond to mail within 24-hours of receipt. I can't imagine the stress for a family who has to find a translator, or isn't able to respond to written correspondence, or can't keep records of paperwork, or doesn't have the tenacity to leave more than one message.

Even when services are intact, accessing person-centered options for support are difficult. Two years ago, as the pandemic was causing shutdown all over Minnesota, I had no fewer than 7 of my son's requested supports denied. Only 2 of the items were supports that he hadn't previously received, some of them had been in his annual plan for decades. Because of my privilege, I was able to rewrite, document accordingly, and receive via reconsideration all of the services. The actual reasons for denial were "new county staff" who didn't know David and "we missed that paragraph; it should have been approved." The year prior to the pandemic, he had an item that was denied in 2005. The denial was overturned via appeals in 2005; redened in 2006 and again overturned in appeal; approved in every annual plan since then and suddenly denied again in 2019. When I protested, stating two appeal decisions as precedent, **I was asked to provide copies** of the appeal results, which thankfully, I had saved.

While I am incredibly grateful for the supports and services my son receives, I worry about people without my resources being able to access the supports and services they need. We can do better for the disabled people of Minnesota.

Respectfully submitted,

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