

Testimony of Leif Grina, President Minneapolis Regional Retiree Council a constituent body of the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation in support of House File 1851.

House Human Services Committee March 1, 2023

Mr. Chairman and members of the Human Services Policy Committee, my name is Leif Grina and I am submitting this on behalf of the membership of the Minneapolis Regional Retiree Council. The Council is made up of retired unionists of 19 labor unions: teachers, craftsmen and women, service workers, public employees and industrial unionists. We actively engage our membership in education, public policy and elections to amplify their voices and make their life circumstances known.

I'm here to support older adults who want to remain in their own homes and apartments, in communities that are familiar and in which they feel safe and secure, that is to age-in-place. Most seniors live in their homes; over 90% live independently in Minnesota communities. According to our state demographer, over half of senior home-owners have incomes of \$25,000 or less per year. Yet only about 20% of older adults who live independently take advantage of community supports and services. We know that seniors who remain in their own homes help their communities and the state by holding down the costs of institutional care and have better emotional, mental and physical health. According to a study by the University of Missouri at Columbia:

“Aging in place preserves seniors' independence, [and] reduces care costs...

In a four-year analysis of AIP, the total care costs for residents were thousands less than traditional care options. Costs for living and health care never approached the costs for nursing homes and assisted-living services. In addition, AIP residents had improved mental and physical health outcomes.”

Over the past year our Council has researched the various barriers seniors face to stay in their own homes. We've found that the desire to remain in one's home doesn't vary by income or health or where one lives. But often a minor thing is a barrier: a ride to go shopping, someone to clear the walks or take snow off the roof, do simple household chores. Certainly, larger barriers exist: the need for an access ramp, a furnace repair, a visiting nurse. Yet services like these are fragmented,

underfunded, limited by eligibility, not doable within the existing program, or often unknown to seniors who need help.

We've discovered that it is the non-profit agency operating at the community level that does the best job of helping seniors navigate the complexity of services to deal with their barriers. Being in the community they are best situated to help with the services that are needed by seniors to remain in their own homes. Strengthening the ability of these non-profits with better funding, including administrative duties will be a positive step in making community-based services more available.

We support expanding these services to more seniors without regard to income levels. Services to more, or to all seniors is possible by a sliding fee system. Middle income seniors, no less than the working-class and lower-income seniors, face barriers, and their ability to pay some of their needed services costs can only help make things more fair as well as meet the intent of this legislation.

Getting old, it has been said "Ain't for the feint of Heart". Indeed many elders are among the bravest and most stoic people I know as they navigate the physical, mental and emotional challenges that getting old presents. Supporting us through these years isn't about a handout- it is about encouraging brave heart. We urge your support for this bill. Elders are not about Minnesota's past-we are about its' future