5/1/2023

Dear Chairs Hoffman, Noor, and members of the Human Services Conferece Committee,

My name is Alicia Olson and I own Olson Homes  in Zimmerman, MN.  I care for 1 adult currently in my home with my husband and supplemental staff (2 part time staff).  I have been a family foster care provider for 3 years and prior to that was a supervisor in a CRS for 13years. My family has always had an adult with disabilities living with them as we lived in the CRS Home and now as an FRS. Each client I have the honor of serving becomes a part of the family. They are my life and my family. The current scenario of the state feeling family providers do not need to be paid a sustainable wage as we “live in our own homes” is quite honestly screams the lack of knowledge surrounding this demographic.

Yes, I work in my own home, and to be honest it is the most rewarding job I have ever had. The consistency that I have been able to provide allows me to notice little changes in health and seek medical attention which ended up saved their life. Through the same spirit of consistency, I’ve helped my client manage diabetes without medications and most recently provide such a safe and loving environment that their mental health diagnosis improved to the degree that many medications have stopped. My client needs 24-hour cares, ambulation with assistance, have medical complications and deep mental health issues that can spiral so quickly with just one wrong glance their way. My client also needs constant interaction and the presence of myself to keep anxiety at bay. They also thrive in an environment where they have one primary provider, a few hours without seeing me is all they are able to handle before it triggers mental health issues. They would never flourish in a CRS because of the turnover rate, they also could never be alone. They aren’t just a roommate I cook for; they are someone I dedicate my life to 100%. My husband and kids do as well.

Yes, I sleep in my own bed but every night I sleep with a baby monitor on so I can hear if a person is in distress due to medical and behavioral issues.  I am up 1-2 times a night to toilet and generally only get 4 hours of sleep if it is a good night.  But yes, I sleep in my own bed. In fact, I am currently on hour 30 awake as I type due to my person needed extra support last night. I’ve held the hands of suicidal individuals for hours at night. I’ve talked through nightmares. I’ve chatted with those who can’t sleep but can’t be left to just lay there as anxiety would take them to dark places. So, I home. Often, I’m not in my own bed and if I am, it’s a broken quality lacking sleep. Why? Because my person deserves it. They need it. It’s an honor to do so. However, again, the false narrative that we are just getting paid for nothing is so harsh.

The Governor’s proposal is to move FRS to a flat tier system of payment and add Life Sharing skills to that group.  It would be a $11.700 million fiscal savings in 2026-27.  They feel that FRS have, “a DWRS rate framework, but the service is unique among DWRS services.”  We follow the same rules and regulations as all the other groups on the DWRS framework such as CRS, (Community Residential Services), Employment services, Day programs, Customized Living, and others.  We have supplemental staff to help us so that we can do outings, paperwork, interact with our people and maybe have an evening or day off.  That is no different in any other framework setting except we live in the home and that is our choice.  If we move to the flat tier rate many homes will close as rates will not be sustainable.  FRS homes want to be paid a fair rate and myself as the primary staff and doing all the other things an FRS provider must do I deserve a fair rate of pay.

During Covid I went 17 months without a day off.  I had to have everything delivered to us. I didn’t have staff help. I helped a special needs adult cope with their entire lives turned upside down. I just want to be paid like the others who do what I do. I can verify that we whole heartedly do exactly what CRS homes do with less help. We provide a consistency they can’t. We provide a family atmosphere to a population whom likely never had a real positive example of what family is. We bring them to holidays, sporting events, vacations, birthday celebrations, bowling, out to eat etc. They are a part of our family. Many of us providers even pay for these things to ensure they can participate on their limited income. This model is one of many that MN has to provide to those who thrive in this set up. We are as vital as CRS. Moving FRS to a tier rate is not good.  The flat rate is not sustainable for my home to then continue to function, as I would be cut 50-60% for my person. A rate that doesn’t allow me to continue to employ my part time staff. Yielding a really hard decision to choose to support my person with zero support or seeking employment elsewhere and uprooting my residents entire life to live elsewhere, no doubt causing a massive relapse. I know I’m not alone in this and worry that with CRS home’s closing due to staffing, Nursing Homes closing, FRS homes closing is going to leave a large part of our population either neglected &/ or displaced. We are stepping backwards towards the institutions we worked so hard to leave. Why should individuals who thrive in FRS settings be punished? Why should their living situation be threatened because of a budget? They matter! Their lives matter, their needs matter. That is the entire premise of Person Centered Planning, yet, here we are about to cause a massive disrupt to the lives of those who we have spent so much time and money to protect and better.

I beg of you to not let this happen to FRS homes.  We serve a great need just like CRS do.  Please keep us under the rate system like the CRS homes will be, allowing individuals to continue to thrive in their homes and stay out of hospital systems.

I also want to make sure you support the HF999 and SF1015 for the Best Life Alliance and DWRS frameworks rate increase. Our homes need to be able to pay our supplemental staff a fair wage like all others or we cannot get time away. Please support this so we can continue to support these amazing people!

Thank you for your time,

Alicia Olson

Olson Homes

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