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April 28, 2023

To the Members of the Omnibus Human Services Finance Bill Conference Committee,

Greetings from Northeast Contemporary Services, Inc. (NCSI)! We are a nonprofit Home and Community Based Services organization that provides Day Support and Employment programs for adults and seniors who have intellectual and developmental disabilities. We are located in Roseville and serve people who reside in Anoka, Hennepin, Ramsey, and Washington counties.

On behalf of the people we serve, our staff and our volunteers, thank you to both the House and the Senate for your proposed investments in the Disability Waiver Rate System (DWRS)! If passed, these investments will allow us to increase our Direct Support Professionals' (DSP) wages and benefits, which is necessary to recover, maintain and increase services for people with disabilities. 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 in SF2934 3rd Engrossment and in SF2934 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.

Why are these investments necessary? Here at NCSI, we have been unable to recover pre-COVID service levels because of the workforce crisis. Due to the unlivable wages for DSPs that are built into the DWRS, we have been unable to remain competitive in our hiring and have been understaffed for almost three years. Since we can't provide the required staffing ratios, we are unable to serve people newly interested in our services and currently have a waiting list of over 30 people—this represents over 40% of our licensed capacity. Moreover, the impossibility of hiring staff means we cannot expand the community integration experiences and the competitive integrated employment opportunities that people with disabilities deserve and expect.

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

Sincerely,

Jennifer Freeburg  
Executive Director