



January 28, 2022

Chair Schultz and Members of the House Human Service Finance and Policy Committee:

The Best Life Alliance was formed in 2014 to bring organizations and individuals together to find solutions for the crisis level staffing shortage that exists throughout the Home and Community-Based Services that support people with disabilities. The legislature has made significant investments in disability services since the inception of the Best Life Alliance. Those investments have made a difference and are greatly appreciated. Despite those investments the workforce shortage has only worsened, the impact being felt across all corners of the state and among all service types.

In the area of residential disability services, providers have reported large vacancy rates for their Direct Support Professional positions, some sharing that they currently have over 30% of their positions unfilled. ARRM, the state wide trade association for residential service providers recent 2020 Industry Report showed a turnover rate of nearly 50% for Direct Support Professionals and an average hourly starting wage of a little over \$14 an hour. These numbers are not sustainable and have forced provider organizations to reduce the number of individuals they can support and in some instances permanently close homes. The inability to recruit employees has resulted in many individual with disabilities not receiving the services and supports they need to live the lives they choose.

Similarly, in the area of employment and day activity supports for adults with disabilities, service providers across the state have growing waiting lists of Minnesotans with disabilities wishing to access those services for the first time or return post COVID to employment or day supports. The inability to find staff to support adults with disabilities in their employment and day support activities has ripple effects. It can place stress on the family members or residential service staff who now may be responsible for providing supports during the day as well, and most importantly it means that these adults with disabilities are not able to fulfill their basic preferences and desires for their employment and daytime activities.

We recognize that the workforce shortage is not unique to disability services and that industries around the state are feeling the immense stress of the current labor market. However, unlike other industries, the shortage of workers for disability service providers creates health and safety concerns for individuals that rely on staff to support them in their day-to-day activities. **Home and Community Based-Services that support people with disabilities are not able to close for the day when staff are not available; people supporting other people is the heart of what we do.**

The Best Life Alliance strongly supports and encourages the legislature to make further investments in wages for Direct Support Professionals and their Supervisors. We can not afford to allow our wages to fall further behind other service industries. As one step forward in this work, the Best Life Alliance is currently working on a 2022 legislative proposal aimed at updating portions of the disability services rate reimbursement system that draw on market data that is outdated by multiple years.

We want to thank Chair Schultz for holding this hearing and bringing further attention to the crisis level workforce shortage. We are eager to continue working hand-in-hand with the legislature as we work towards stabilizing Home and Community-Based Services.

Sincerely,

Best Life Alliance Coalition Members