

Co-Chairs Paul Torkelson and Zack Stephenson

House Ways and Means Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Re: Opposing the Reinstatement of TEFRA Parental Fees

Dear Co-Chairs Torkelson and Stephenson, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am a parent of a child with a disability who currently receives care through Minnesota's TEFRA program. I also am closely connected to other families raising MN children with disabilities. I'm writing today to urge you not to reinstate parental fees for TEFRA.

As someone living this reality every day, I can tell you: TEFRA is not a luxury. It is a lifeline. And reinstating parental fees would turn that lifeline into a burden — a regressive tax on families like mine, simply for needing support to help our children live healthy, safe lives.

Minnesota has long prided itself on equitable access to healthcare. Removing TEFRA fees in 2023 was a meaningful step in that direction. Reinstating them would undo progress and punish families already carrying immense financial, emotional, and logistical responsibilities.

The argument for reinstating fees is that they promote fiscal responsibility. But the actual revenue they bring in is minimal — and comes at a high cost. Families often pay thousands per year, while navigating complex administrative hurdles. These fees don't just cost money — they cost time, mental health, and stability.

Let me share two examples:

- One family I know is divorced. The custodial parent's income is modest, around 300% of the federal poverty level. But because the **non-custodial ex-spouse** earns above the threshold, they would be required to contribute. This not only introduces a **high-conflict financial dynamic** into the family — it threatens the child's access to care. When parents are not on the same page or are in contentious relationships, the **child becomes the one who suffers**. That's not what our system should be enabling.
- In another case, a parent is considering **quitting their job** just to lower their household income and avoid the TEFRA fee — a desperate decision that could cost the family their financial stability and the state valuable tax revenue. That's a no-win situation for everyone.

These scenarios are not rare. They're the reality for many families navigating disability, healthcare, and parenthood in Minnesota. TEFRA is the only option for many of us to get the care our children need — and parental fees make that care inaccessible.

Reinstating these fees is not fiscal responsibility. It's an **ineffective, inequitable, and harmful policy** that amounts to a **tax on disability**.

I urge you to protect families like mine and preserve the current, fee-free TEFRA structure. Let's continue to be a state that leads with compassion, fairness, and smart policy.

Thank you for your time and your service.

Sincerely,

Jamie O'Conner