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**ATAM – The Autism Treatment Association of Minnesota**

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March 6, 2023

Dear Chair Fischer and members of the House Human Services Policy Committee,

ATAM is a statewide association of autism providers that promotes policy initiatives that improve access to quality services and supports for children with autism and their families.

We write in strong support of H.F. 1604, a bill aimed at stabilizing the MA EIDBI agency sector statewide. H.F. 1604 is an emergency grant program that aims to provide the financial relief that existing EIDBI agencies desperately need to stay afloat to better serve children who have autism and their families.

ATAM members, like most EIDBI agencies across the state, have been struggling under the weight of significant financial losses after the twin crises of pandemic surges and resulting increased staffing shortages and high turnover rates. In addition, the costs of doing business have also increased with inflation.

Carryover losses vary by provider, but many have suffered losses in the range of six figures. MA EIDBI providers are simply not able to get out from under these losses without legislative action because they are reimbursed on a fee-for-service schedule that does not include any adjustments.

The MA EIDBI benefit was enacted in 2013 to ensure equal access for families seeking recommended early intervention for their children and to ensure timely access so that children can grow and thrive in community. The statute recognized a workforce shortage and a need to grow provider capacity statewide. The department, with stakeholder input, has worked tirelessly to remove administrative barriers and increase provider capacity. In fact, the number of MA EIDBI agencies had steadily increased in the years prior to the pandemic.

We urge you to act now to stabilize the existing MA EIDBI agency provider sector and consider additional ways to continue to grow provider capacity so that the 3,000 children waiting to access services through the MA EIDBI benefit will be able to take advantage of recommended early intervention supports and services in a timely manner.

Thank you so much to Rep. Freiberg for bringing this critical bill and to committee members for supporting it.

It will make a difference for children and families.

Melissa Haley, J.D., Public Policy Director

Autism Treatment Association of Minnesota (ATAM)