

Testimony from Lance Hegland for the Human Services Finance and Policy Committee

Meeting Wednesday, March 2 from 10:30 AM until Noon

Chair Schultz and members, my name is Lance Hegland. I was a longtime resident of Southeast Minneapolis who recently moved to Brooklyn Center. I'm here to testify in support of House File 2925, as I believe it is an important step to help us to stabilize and begin rebuilding our home and community-based services for Minnesotans relying on direct supports, like me — people with disabilities, those with chronic illness, and older adults.

My journey highlights these needs. A little over 20 years ago, I needed to move into a nursing home because of the lack of home care services in rural Minnesota. Shortly after that, Minnesota was implementing the US Supreme Court Olmsted Decision, which empowered people depending on support services to live, work, and participate more independently and more inclusively in our chosen communities, in our chosen homes. After living in a nursing home for 20 months, I was able to move into my own apartment in a western suburb of the Twin Cities.

Still, it was difficult to find and keep support workers (personal care assistants [PCAs]) who were reliable, qualified, and available. So, within two years, I needed to move again, into an apartment in Minneapolis near the University of Minnesota and other colleges, where I hoped to connect with students interested in healthcare, human services, and education to work part-time as my support team members.

Within 5 years, things had not improved much. In fact, beginning in July 2010, employment and vacancy data showed that it was becoming more difficult to find and keep support workers throughout the entire state. I needed to spend an incredible amount of time, energy, technology, and money to network, recruit, interview, train, schedule, and otherwise manage my team — it was a full-time job on its own — and as a result, I was no longer able to participate in meaningful employment to earn income.

I pleaded with caseworkers for help. I was referred to many other community resources. Unfortunately, not even independent living services (ILS services) or adult rehabilitative mental health services (ARMHS services) could help; it wasn't within their scope of practice.

Many people living in my apartment building along with several others living within 5 miles of me were also relying on support services. They were experiencing similar staffing challenges. They were struggling to invest similar resources to maintain their teams. They too struggled to maintain meaningful employment. Often, we were duplicating efforts and competing against each other.

The struggle became even greater due to COVID. It would have been much easier if we could have shared our support services and our resources — our time, energy, and talents — if we had chosen to do so.

At the end of last November, I could no longer maintain my health and safety in my apartment. I needed to move into a group home in Brooklyn Center. I lost 95% of my possessions due to very limited personal space where I moved. I lost a great deal of autonomy. I lost a great deal of privacy. I had to adjust to an entirely new team of support workers.

This journey has impacted my physical health, my mental health, and my cognitive functioning. After struggling to meet my basic health and safety needs for nearly 2 decades, I'm exhausted. I feel defeated. Even if the workforce shortage is resolved during my lifetime, it would cost over \$10,000 to replace all of the items I've lost this year — the items I need to live on my own again.

House File 2925 provides renewed hope for people relying on support services who've been struggling to stay in their homes over the past 10 years. House File 2925 is one of the first bills I'm aware of that empowers individuals and families to pool resources, to support one another — to be interdependent. Because our society — and especially our direct support industry — have been lacking sufficient resources to meet our health and safety needs for many years, I believe House File 2925 provides additional options — a lifeline, if you will — to people relying on supports, our support workers, and our families.