



April 8, 2022

Chair Schultz and Members of the Committee,

My name is Julie Johnson, and I am the President of MSS - an organization that provides employment and day support services to people with disabilities. I am also the President of MOHR, a statewide association of over 100 organizations providing employment and day support services to Minnesotans with disabilities.

We are alarmed to see the A-5 Amendment posted to remove the language in HF4579 that provides needed investments in the Disability Waiver Rate System. With the adoption of that amendment, the bill does not meaningfully address the dire lack of staff available to provide disability waived services and the system is on the verge of collapse. Currently, many Minnesotans with disabilities are facing critical challenges including rising mental health struggles and lack of access to services due to the extreme shortage of staff available to provide them the supports to lead community connected lives. Across the state, employment and day support programs for people with disabilities have growing waiting lists of Minnesotans with disabilities wishing to access employment and day support services for the first time or return post COVID for whom providers cannot find staff. This is at the same time that some group homes are closing, and services to people living independently are becoming more and more limited. This investment is vital to the lives of people with disabilities—it should not be removed.

Additionally, MOHR supports the provisions in HF4579 focused on increased independence and informed choice for Minnesotans with disabilities for their employment and day enrichment supports. The bill's proposal to update the wage data for the Employment Exploration reimbursement rate will help to increase access to this service that is focused on helping people with disabilities understand and gain exposure to competitive, integrated employment options. Additionally, the bill's proposal of one-time workforce incentive grants will help our efforts to attract and retain much needed disability services staff. The bill also makes additional proposals to address reimbursement rates for certain disability services, which are very important.

If we as a state value Minnesotans with disabilities living full and meaningful lives, our state-imposed reimbursement rates must be set at a level to pay for the staff supports necessary to make that possible. We have to work together to make this possible. Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony, and please reach out with further questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie Johnson | MOHR President

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