

Good afternoon Mr. Chair, Madam Vice-Chair, members of the working group. My name is Nicole Mattson with Care Providers of Minnesota, here today on behalf of the Long-Term Care Imperative.

Our members, who consist of providers throughout the senior care continuum- providing care and services to older adults statewide, have served heroically throughout the pandemic. Their work has supported Minnesota's most vulnerable nonstop, 24/7 for the last 508 days of this pandemic.

The LTCI Hero Pay proposal SF2313/HF2221 was intended to both honor their work and thank them for the contributions they made to health and wellbeing of Minnesota's seniors during the pandemic. Far too often workers in senior care are undervalued and underappreciated. But the men and women of the senior care workforce play a vital role in the care continuum for older adults; their work ensures that seniors can access care and supports when they need them and where they want them. We also saw this bonus as a means for worker retention, at a time when we're facing critical workforce shortages. To let long-term care workers know they are seen, their sacrifices are recognized and their contributions matter.

These are workers who continued to do good work, because their residents and patients needed them, despite the risks, known and unknown. Particularly in the beginning, which I know other testifiers will speak to, when they were not prioritized for ppe, there was no testing, no vaccines, lots of fear, incredible shortages of workers and really no tools other than determination and grit—they still showed up. Early in the pandemic LTC settings were decimated by rampant asymptomatic spread and they shouldered a disproportionate share of COVID cases and deaths. LTC workers worked tirelessly to adapt to new infection control, visitation restrictions and other protocols to mitigate viral spread in their facilities. Then, as testing became more prolific, cycles of worker quarantines arose and many settings experienced acute staffing crises. The resiliency and fortitude of the long-term care workforce was evident as they managed to respond to these challenges and continued to prioritize their resident's needs.

To provide context as you reflect on bonus pay proposals consider these factors about our workforce:

- The senior care workforce is comprised of about 80,000 staff serving over 87,000 seniors in skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities and other congregate living settings.
- Our workforce is predominantly women (78%) and twenty-five percent of our workforce are people of color. In fact, proportionately, our sector is the most diverse sector in the state.
- Statewide hourly median payrates in our sector range from \$16.42 for a Nursing Assistant, \$23.67 for a Licensed Practical Nurse to \$31.17 for a Registered Nurse.
- High rates of turnover are problematic in our very people-dependent profession. Even prior to COVID we had high levels of turnover, which were amplified by many aspects of the pandemic. Our members are experiencing turnover rates as high as 70% and at any given time, we have approximately 10,000 unfilled caregiver positions.

- This while demand for services and supports continues to grow. We estimate that we will need 25,000 more caregivers to meet future care and service needs of our aging population in the coming decade.

This is the workforce who was on the frontlines of the COVID response and will continue to show up for Minnesota's seniors as our state faces yet another pandemic wave. These are the heroes of the pandemic. It's been stated that whatever the working group proposes is likely not enough, and while that's true, a meaningful bonus is a start. It's a tangible recognition of long-term care workers service and commitment throughout this extraordinary public health emergency.

I know that our testifiers can articulate the sacrifices much more clearly so I will turn it over to them.