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August 31, 2021

To: Chairs Winkler and Housley and Members of the Minnesota Frontline Worker Pay Working Group

Re: Hero Pay for Essential Workers

AARP appreciates the work of your committee in establishing Hero Pay for essential workers during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. AARP urges that you ensure this supplemental pay can support long-term care workers who care for Minnesotans living in nursing homes, assisted living homes or other long-term care facilities. These hard-working dedicated workers put their lives on the line every day and put their own families at risk as they continued to care for the most vulnerable during this crisis.

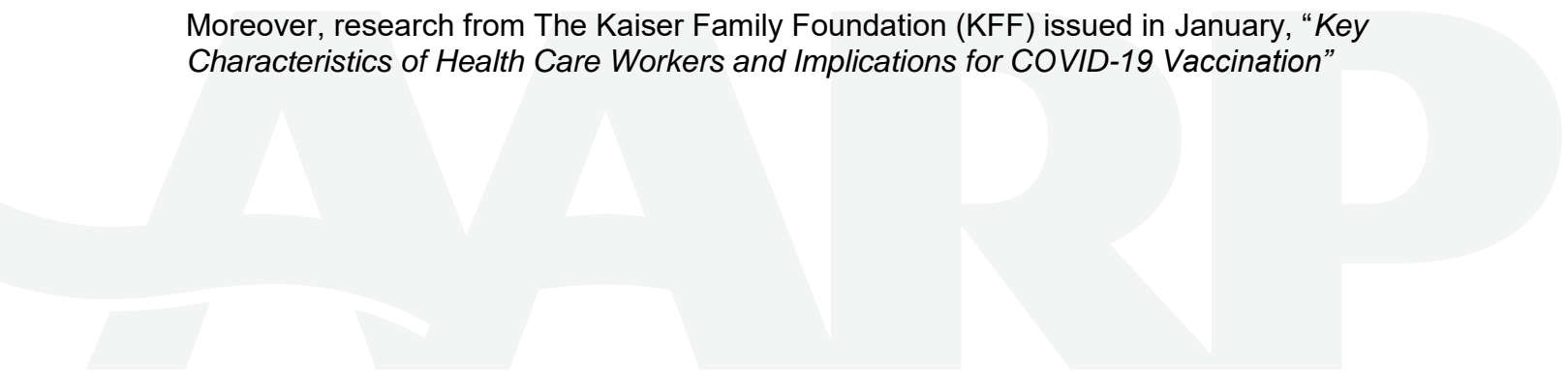
By way of background, AARP strongly supported Representative Frazier's bill House File 41, the Essential Workers Emergency Leave Act which would have provided emergency sick leave for essential workers left out of the Congressional Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA).

Many nursing home workers and assisted living staff saved lives by continuing to show up to their jobs even as their workplaces became the epicenters for infections. At the height of the pandemic, long term care facilities represented almost 80% of Minnesota's Covid-19 deaths.

A hero pay benefit can help essential long-term care workers recover lost wages if they needed to stay home to stop the spread of Covid-19, especially at their place of work where they would put older residents at risk. In addition to the potential for financial relief, this benefit can provide the recognition these workers deserve.

AARP has long called for fair pay and improved working conditions for those caring for the health and well-being of seniors and people with disabilities living in nursing homes and other long-term care settings. Nursing homes often have chronic staff shortages because of relatively low pay, difficult working conditions and limited benefits. The hero pay benefit is an important first step in recognizing these dedicated, hard-working individuals.

Moreover, research from The Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) issued in January, "*Key Characteristics of Health Care Workers and Implications for COVID-19 Vaccination*"



shows that direct care workers in long-term care settings are very often people of color and one-third of long-term care workers are low-income, including 11% who have household income below poverty.

As another wave of the Covid-19, including the Delta and other variants, continue to impact nursing home residents and others living in long-term care settings, we urge the continued attention be made to long-term care work force improvements which can improve outcomes for our communities including the staff, their families and of course residents and their families. Every step law makers and state leaders can take to ensure that long-term care workers at long-last receive a permanent sick leave benefit, enhanced wages and other lasting reforms to address the workforce shortage in long-term facilities is appreciated.

AARP thanks you for your leadership on enacting Hero Pay and look forward to future discussions on how we support these long-term workers in next year's session.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo George
AARP MN
Associate State Director, Advocacy

