

LB601: State intent regarding increases to reimbursement rates paid to providers of developmental disability services (Rate Increase)

Hearing Testimony March 22, 2023

Good afternoon, Chairman Clements, and members of the Committee,

My name is Patrick Hayes (P-A-T-R-I-C-K H-A-Y-E-S), and I am the Chief Financial Officer of Elite Disability Services of Nebraska. Thank you so much for granting us this audience to speak on behalf of the people we are privileged enough to support and employ.

As a veteran of the world's greatest Air Force I've learned that the privilege to serve is accompanied by a responsibility to those we serve. The responsibility that lies before us is in addressing the crisis of care for the most vulnerable citizens of our communities. The solution to this crisis can, in part, be directly attributed to the opportunities that the passage of LB601 creates, to provide not only a livable wage to those who have dedicated their professional lives to the service of others, but also a competitive one.

There are currently over 2,000 Nebraskans on the waitlist for DD waiver services, and their current wait time averages 9 years. This is over 2,000 of the most vulnerable Nebraskans and their parents or guardians waiting 9 years for a glimpse of hope only to have that hope stifled when they learn that staff shortages are now preventing them from receiving the services they have already waited so long for.

The preservation of the status quo is no longer sustainable. Change is necessary.

It is necessary because making a lasting difference in the lives of our most vulnerable citizens has risen to an incredibly high premium. In times past, this sacrifice was rooted in the ability to act selflessly and be intentionally patient in the service of others. Today, those sacrifices remain, but have seen significant additions. Now, it includes the ability to earn a livable wage and the peace of mind that comes from being truly content with the quality of life your wages provide. All of this while working to provide a better quality of life for others, who could only realize that life through the services our agencies provide.

It is through the creation of a competitive wage that we can begin to address the crises before us. Where job opportunities are abundant, but careers are being sought out. By definition a job is any post of employment, but a career is a profession requiring special training, certifications, and professional memberships. All things required by those at every level of our very necessary profession. Couple that with the impending increase in the minimum wage in Nebraska. Currently, this skilled labor force makes on average \$2 per hour less than the proposed increase, and this leaves us well below the requirement that skilled workers stay at least 150% above the rising tide of minimum wage.

The set of circumstances surrounding the passage of LB601 is married to our ability to effect change. As with any industry, money fuels innovation. Innovation in available partnerships and opportunities to create pathways to greater inclusion for the people with I/DD that we are privileged enough to serve. These bills are not just about the wages we can afford to pay and remain sustainable. These bills are about the people who will be affected by the change you have the power to generate, and those of us gifted with the responsibility to carry it out.

So, when our grandchildren ask us where we were when the most vulnerable among us needed leaders of compassion and purpose, we will be able to confidently look to you, and say that we showed up, and we showed up on time. Thank you again for your time and consideration. **You are truly appreciated.**