



July 27, 2021

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL

RE: Written Testimony for the Frontline Worker Pay Working Group

Dear Committee Members,

The Minnesota First Provider Alliance (the “Provider Alliance”) is a trade association of personal care assistance (“PCA”) agencies and waiver service providers. The PCA program is a critical service that assists over 44,000 Minnesotans in their home and community and employs approximately 66,000 PCA workers. Historically, the PCA program has been one of the lowest reimbursed Medicaid services, with a reimbursement rate that is substantially lower than similar type services provided in other disability programs. The PCA program is vital to ensuring that Minnesotans with disabilities and older adults can safely remain in their homes and avoid the need for more costly congregate care services.

We want to share why we believe the hard working, dedicated PCAs who continued to provide care to Minnesota’s most vulnerable citizens deserve to be prioritized for receiving the Frontline Worker Pay. The primary reasons are:

- **PCAs worked throughout the pandemic.** The vital nature of the care and services they provide necessitated that PCA’s leave their home, even during the most stressful first few weeks of the pandemic, and provide care to their clients. Further, as both the state and federal governments scrambled in the beginning of the public health crisis to secure personal protective equipment (PPE) for hospital-based providers, PCA’s and providers struggled to make due with whatever masks and gloves they could acquire on their own. Many resorted to making cloth masks or recruiting friends and family members to make masks.
- **PCAs provide intimate care to individuals.** The very nature of the services provided by PCAs, including assistance with eating, bathing, and using the bathroom, effectively prohibits them from social distancing during work. They are not able to place protective plexiglass between them and the person they are providing care to nor were they able to work from home or provide remote support. Personal care is a one-to-one intimate service where the PCA put the health of themselves and their family at risk by serving their client(s) each day.
- **Minnesota’s reimbursement for PCA services left no room for paid time off or hazard pay.** Throughout the majority of Minnesota’s peacetime emergency, Minnesota’s public health programs only reimbursed PCA services at a rate of \$17.80 an hour. With the low wages necessitated by low state reimbursement and the competitive labor market, PCA agencies simply could not provide any hazard pay. Further, most providers are unable to provide healthcare and only limited, if any, paid time off. This means that if a PCA got sick or needed to be out due to an exposure they almost always went without pay.

- The significant majority of the people who receive and those that provide PCA services are women and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Additionally, we know that the COVID pandemic had a disproportionate impact on BIPOC communities. Therefore, PCAs were not only providing essential services to some of the most high-risk populations, but they themselves were frequently members of communities that were disproportionately impacted.

We believe that the hardworking PCAs employed by our member agencies are just as deserving of any Frontline Worker Pay as any other category of essential worker. Thank you in advance for acknowledging the work PCAs have done during the COVID-19 pandemic and prioritizing PCAs as essential workers eligible for the Frontline Worker Pay. If you have any questions or would like to discuss, we would be happy to meet with you.

Sincerely,



Dena Belisle, President
Minnesota First Provider Alliance

CC:

Rep. Cedrick Frazier

Rep. Anne Neu Brindley

Rep. Ryan Winkler

Sen. Karin Housley

Sen. Mary Kiffmeyer

Sen. Erin Murphy

Comm. Robert Doty

Comm. Steve Grove

Comm. Roslyn Robertson

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