

**Department of Health and Human Services Budget Senate Appropriations – Human
Resources Division**

House Bill 1012

Tuesday March 18, 2025

Chairman Dever and members of the committee,

My name is Jessica Dargis and I am the CEO of Enable Inc, located in Bismarck ND. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of HB 1012.

I am writing to express my strong support for initiatives aimed at improving the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These individuals rely on critical services and supports provided by organizations across the state, and it is essential that we continue to strengthen and expand these services to meet their needs."

Inflationary Increase of 4% and 3%

I stand before you advocating for an inflationary increase of 4% and 3% for this biennium for developmental disability service providers. These proposed increases are critical to ensure that providers can continue to attract and retain the highly skilled professionals necessary to deliver the essential services that individuals with developmental disabilities depend on. The job market is tough, and without this increase, we risk further destabilizing a workforce that is already underpaid and overburdened.

The job market today is more competitive than ever. Many sectors are experiencing labor shortages, but the developmental disability services sector faces an even more pressing challenge. We are competing for talent in a market where wages for direct care workers, case managers, therapists, and other support staff in the developmental disability field have remained stagnant for too long. The work these employees do is demanding, often requiring a high level of patience, skill, and emotional resilience. Yet, despite their critical role, compensation has not kept pace with the increasing cost of living or with the demands placed on workers.

Without these professionals, the support systems that so many individuals rely on would crumble, leaving people with developmental disabilities at risk of isolation, reduced access to essential care, and a diminished quality of life.

Things we often take for granted, such as going to the mall or store to buy something we want, are being denied to the individuals we support due to staff shortages. We want those

individuals to thrive in their homes and communities, but when we have to plan weeks in advance and hope no one gets sick just to take someone shopping, it becomes clear that we are not providing the least restrictive setting. Denying someone the opportunity to use their personal funds to buy a shirt they desire simply because of a lack of staffing is a denial of their basic rights. It is crucial that we have enough support to ensure these individuals can participate in everyday activities like shopping, which are important for their independence and well-being.

I urge you to reevaluate the state's budget to allow for a 4% and 3% biennial increase for developmental disability providers. These increases are not just about raising wages—they are about ensuring that the people who care for our most vulnerable individuals are supported, valued, and equipped to do their jobs effectively. The challenges in the job market are real, and if we do not act now, we risk further destabilizing an already fragile workforce.

Fully Funding ICF and Residential Habilitation Services

I'm also advocating for the full funding of Intermediate Care Facilities (ICF) and Residential Habilitation Services at 100% of the computed and intended rates.

Currently, ICF funding is 89.7% and Res Hab funding is 91.6% of the computed rates falls short of meeting the needs of the individuals we serve. This level of funding is not only insufficient but also sends a troubling message: that the individuals we support are somehow less worthy of the full investment they deserve. When funding is less than 100%, it implies that their care and well-being are not as important as others who are served on the same DD waivers, which is simply unfair and unjust. These individuals deserve the same level of care, respect, and support as anyone else, and that requires fully funding these programs at the rates originally intended.

Thank you,

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