

Testimony on OLA-PCA Bill
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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Committee Members. Thank you for the opportunity to offer my testimony today on Representative Larry Hosch's bill on improving PCA services.

I am a personal care attendant (PCA) and president of the Direct Support Professional Association of Minnesota (DSPAM). I also participate in the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD).

We support the personal care assistant services training recommendations in this Bill. The development of comprehensive training on personal care assistant standards and practices is critical to the sustainability and integrity of personal care assistant services.

In fact, in order to improve everyone's understanding of the rules of the program, we support training for all parties involved in PCA services. I would encourage the Committee to make sure that consumers still have an active voice in the designing of standardized training and in making sure that the training reinforces that the consumer is still responsible for providing valuable on the job training as well.

We also support other aspects of the Bill, such as giving the home care bill of rights to all who use PCA services and being sure folks get a copy of their assessments and service plans. We support the fiscal integrity improvements. "We strongly oppose fraud"!

PCA services are designed to be very flexible and serve a great variety of needs, and also cost much less and offer a far greater quality of life than the alternative-institutionalization, for example, nursing homes. These are valuable services that do need to be improved and the CCD is a partner in these efforts.

Standardized training for PCAs is an important step toward the professionalization of the PCA workforce, which serves Minnesotans who have disabilities, are older, or have mental illness, in home- and community-based settings.

A well-trained, professional PCA workforce will create more assurances of appropriate, high-quality services being provided and will increase accountability and safety in practice.

Due to the complex skill sets that are required to be a successful PCA, these staff must be invested in with proper training in order to complete the necessary tasks that will best assist consumers with meeting their goals, leading more independent lives, contributing to society, and participating in community life.

If standard training is kept up-to-date, and widely-available through web-based training, it will be useful and should improve services for PCA consumers.

Standardizing PCA services will bolster this essential workforce and will lower turnover rates, which are as high as 200% in the direct care and support field, which includes PCAs. Turnover is extremely expensive, so controlling it, and creating more professional buy-in for PCAs, will result in cost-savings. Furthermore, since agencies will be responsible for providing the training, requiring standardized training of PCAs will not cost the State more money, and will save money in the long-term.

Direct support work is also one of the fastest-growing occupational sectors in America with demand about to explode with the demographic shift and the retirement of the Baby Boomers already beginning to occur. The time is now to require and provide standardized training for PCAs in order to safely and effectively provide services to Minnesotans who need them in a dignified and modernized manner.

We look forward to working with the Committee and Representative Larry Hosch to reform PCA services. Thank you for the privilege to offer my testimony.