

Date: October 2, 2024

To: Leah Solo
Executive Director
Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board
Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry

Jamie Gulley
Chair, Board of Directors
Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board
Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry

From: Paula Rocheleau, Board Member
Katie Lundmark, Board Member
Mary Swanson, Board Member
Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board

Our caregivers deserve higher wages for the incredible work they do in caring for our growing senior population. Long-term care settings rely on reimbursements from the state and federal government and can only raise wages for caregivers if the state provides additional funding required to achieve this goal. This is why we serve on the Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board. It is also why we continue to work toward achieving mutually agreed upon outcome of improving the wages of Minnesota's nursing facility employees.

Recently, we became aware of an unsigned letter that was hand delivered to a nursing facility employer. The unsigned letter specifically asserts that **our** voting to abstain on the minimum wage and mandated time and half pay standards leaves an impression that we do not support higher wages and benefits. Of course, the unsigned letter's characterization of abstaining could not be farther from reality. As Board members we have not engaged in gamesmanship or withheld our ideas. Instead, we have, made it noticeably clear that we are supportive of raising employee wages. But we cannot, as Board members, vote affirmatively for standards that many nursing facilities will be unable to meet without upfront funding from the legislature.

Our concern with the minimum wage rules from the Nursing Home Workforce Standards board is not out of a lack of concern for workers to earn family-sustaining wages, but precisely because these proposed rules will in fact work against the desired outcome. As evidenced by recent closing of beds or entire facilities, nursing homes cannot do this alone. If nursing home employers are to raise wages for their dedicated caregivers, the state must provide the funding to enable that to happen. An unfunded mandate will not solve the problem we are all trying to address.

For years, we have been consistent voices at the legislature advocating for our caregivers and the access to care that Minnesota's growing population of seniors deserve. During the 2024 Legislative Session, nursing home advocates put forth a bill (HF3391/SF4130) that would have provided a substantial average wage increase for all nursing home workers. Unfortunately, the legislature chose not to pass this bill, meaning long-term care settings continue to lack the funding necessary to increase caregiver wages.

We agree with the 4 out of 5 Minnesotans who believe that those who care for the elderly deserve wages comparable to working in other healthcare sectors and we hope to see state leaders meet their responsibility to our seniors and caregivers this upcoming legislative session. We stand ready to work with them to find the right solutions.