

Written Testimony: Sarah Lewerenz, AFSCME Council 65  
Minnesota Senate HHS \$  
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My name is Sarah Lewerenz. I represent the members of AFSCME Council 65 which is a union representing 14,000 public and non-profit employees in Greater Minnesota. Among the 14,000 members are employees who work in Home and Community Based Services such as assisted living and developmental achievement centers.

I'd like to give you some examples of what our members in a developmental achievement center in Northwestern Minnesota make in an hourly wages:

- a van driver who makes \$10.00 an hour;
- a job trainer who makes \$11.90 an hour;
- a job trainer who has worked at the developmental achievement center for 35 years and makes \$13.85 an hour.

Those numbers are kind of abstract so let me talk about what the numbers mean in real life. The van driver makes \$1,733 a month. If they have a \$800 mortgage, pay a \$100 a month in property taxes, pay \$200 in utilities and car and home insurance and pay \$300 for transportation, they have \$333 a month for food, clothing, medical bills and everything else. \$333. The job trainer who makes \$11.90 an hour makes \$2,063 a month and if they have the same bills as the van driver,

after paying for their mortgage, utilities, transportation, etc. they have \$663 a month for food, clothing, medical bills and everything else.

I truly have no idea how these people make it on these salaries.

I had employees from this developmental achievement center come down and testify at the Capitol three years ago. One of the employees testified that she and her children lived with her parents because she couldn't afford housing. The other employee testified she worked six days a week – five days at the developmental achievement center and a sixth day at another facility for the disabled. She testified that, as is often typical in this area, her husband's work was seasonal. So, she said when her husband was on layoff, they fed the kids first and only ate if there was something left. She told that committee that it was "very depressing to work six days a week and not be able to eat." I also represented two Home Health Aides who told me they couldn't afford to even buy their clothes at Walmart. They shopped for their clothes at rummage sales.

These employees work very hard caring for Minnesotans with disabilities. That is important work. We should compensate these employees based on how important their work is.

In the last biennium we dealt with the under-funding of nursing homes. With a \$1.6 billion surplus, we now need to do the same for these employees.

Thank you for listening.