



Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATE'S ELECTED OFFICIALS MUST SHOW LEADERSHIP IN PROTECTING VULNERABLE MINNESOTANS, DISABILITY ADVOCACY GROUP SAYS ***STRONG STATE LEADERSHIP NEEDED TO PUSH FOR INNOVATIVE SERVICES, NOT CUTS***

Duluth, MN – April 14, 2010 -- State elected officials are not providing the necessary leadership to protect persons with disabilities from harmful cuts to human services, according to Arc Northland, an advocacy group for persons with intellectual and other developmental disabilities. "Our legislators and the Governor must help must promote innovations in human services, not just propose more service cuts," Lynne Frigaard, Arc Northland's Executive Director said at a news conference on April 14th at the Downtown Radisson Hotel in Duluth. "These cuts are a tax on our most vulnerable citizens. They can lead to serious medical or dental issues, place greater stress on families with children with disabilities, and result in a loss of independence and greater isolation from the community."

At the news conference, one family with several children with disabilities revealed the toll that proposed cuts will have on them. Jim and Jan Stelman currently have six adopted kids with disabilities. For years, they have relied on PCAs to help take care of their children with disabilities. "One of my daughters wears braces on her feet and the PCAs make sure she gets her braces on and walks with them. I have two kids that have seizures and I have one who has asthma. The PCAs know how to run the machines to help him breath if he's having struggles," said Stelman.

If Jan needs to run to the doctor with one of the kids, it is easier to take only that child and leave the others at home with a qualified care giver. When Jan is home with the kids, she still needs constant help. Beverly Fertig is one of the PCAs who has worked with the Stelman family for six years. "You have to keep an eye on them all the time. If you go to fix a snack or get something, you come back to total chaos. They need constant supervision to ensure their safety. With new state guidelines, the Stelmans have had their PCA hours drastically reduced and they are not alone. There is legislation that has been proposed that would deny PCA services to 1,600 Minnesota families, effective July 1st, 2010.

The Governor's budget would mean an additional \$347 million in cuts in human services -- larger than cuts proposed for any other area of the state budget. "The Governor's cuts will hurt people with disabilities in a number of ways," said Steve Larson, The Arc of Minnesota Public Policy Director, who also made a statement at the news conference. "They would eliminate physical, occupational, and speech therapy for adults on Medical Assistance; reduce rates to service providers; cap the number of new services for the 4,000 Minnesotans who are waiting to live in the community; and eliminate specially-prescribed diets for low-income Minnesotans with serious medical conditions."

"We can do better," Larson continued. "There are several innovative ways of providing services that meet the needs of our citizens with disabilities and that may cost less than traditional ways of serving our

vulnerable citizens. Giving people more control over the funding, staffing, and choice of their services is one way of providing quality supports in a cost-effective manner.”

The Minnesota House and Senate have not yet released their overall budgets for human service spending for this session. At this point, they are waiting to hear how much money will be available for human services in Minnesota through the federal stimulus bill and health care reform. Some specific bills already introduced in the Minnesota House, however, would make harsh cuts to human services. For example, a bill was heard in Minnesota House committees last month that would accelerate last year’s cuts to personal care attendant (PCA) services. (PCA services are a cost-effective way to help individuals with disabilities remain as independent as possible.)

Arc Northland is a non-profit membership-based organization serving children and adults with disabilities and their families. It provides advocacy and support for persons with disabilities and their families so they can choose how they live, learn, work, and play in their communities. For more than 50 years, it has helped people with disabilities and their families overcome challenges and thrive in community life. Arc Northland serves individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in southern St. Louis, Lake, and Carlton Counties.

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