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Media Release

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Area Legislators Share Coffee, Ideas With Local Disability Service Advocate

Representatives from disability service providers in southwestern and south-central Minnesota thanked legislators for investing in the direct support workforce

BLUE EARTH, MINN. – Representatives from several organizations which provide supportive services to people with disabilities in Southern Minnesota met with local legislators to express the importance of recent investments in their workforce by the State Legislature, and to discuss future ideas for meeting the support and care goals for people seeking greater independence and community inclusion.

Sen. Julie Rosen (R-Vernon Center) and Rep. John Petersburg (R-Waseca) sat down Wednesday for coffee and pastry with more than a dozen representatives from area service providers at the Blue Earth Hometown Restaurant. They discussed the benefit investments in better wages for the staff who deliver services in people's homes and programs – Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) – will have as providers combat extreme workforce shortages, both regionally and throughout the state. The State Legislature passed legislation this year which will invest more than \$60 million over the next four years to raise the wages of the more than 75,000 DSPs in Minnesota, whose current average wage sits at just over \$13 per hour.

The group also discussed issues which still present challenges to meeting the demand for services, particularly the need in rural communities for a stable spectrum of options. Losing critical services, or a lack of capacity, can mean people are forced to move far away from home and family. Alternatively, family members may be forced to become caregivers, impacting the broader local workforce which is also historically tight.

The event was organized by ARRM, a trade association representing organizations in the home and community-based services industry, as part of an ongoing effort to strengthen communication and effectiveness of the public-private sector relationship which defines services for people with disabilities in Minnesota.

“These critical supports are almost entirely funded through public spending, and yet delivered predominantly by private non-profit and for-profit organizations,” said Sue Schettle, ARRM CEO. “Minnesota has historically been a national leader in the standard of care and supporting greater independence for people with disabilities and regular conversations like this are essential to continuing that leadership.”

Home and community-based service organizations began as an alternative to large, state-run institutions and helped launch a dramatic expansion of the care, support, residential and community engagement opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities over the last 50 years. Dozens of organizations operate these programs across Southern Minnesota, supporting hundreds of people with disabilities and employing thousands.