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Senate Ways & Means Committee

Senator Carolyn McGinn, Chair

Grassroots Advocates for Independent Living (GRAIL) is a statewide network of grassroots disability advocates committed to elevating and addressing issues to remove barriers to community living and full integration for Kansans with disabilities across the state of Kansas.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our ideas on SB348.

One of the ongoing GRAIL priorities has been to address the workforce shortage issues currently facing the direct support workforce, and that will only grow as the aging population in our state outpaces the availability of workers to support Kansans in their homes. GRAIL formed in large part to address worker recruitment and retention, and removing barriers to self-directing consumers employing direct support workers, such as the criminal background check policies the administration has extended to include direct support workers.

The workforce issues addressed in SB348 apply to **any** Kansan who uses long term services and supports; workforce issues cut across disability type, geographic location in the state, and quite honestly, funding sources. Current Home and Community Based Services programs do not have reimbursement rates for direct support workers nearly adequate to make these jobs competitive under any of the Waiver programs.

SB348 should be expanded to include all Kansans with disabilities and aging Kansans using Home and Community Based Services under the seven (7) Medicaid Waiver programs. Reimbursement rate increases are needed for providers and direct support workers for all the programs. Any phase in of rates should include all populations. The rate study proposed in Section 1(b) of SB 348 should be expanded to all of the waivers that carry a waiting list, or are at risk of a waiting list, at the time of the study.

For business and providers, the adequacy of reimbursement rates is a matter of economics; for people with disabilities the resulting lack of services that support community living is a matter of our civil rights. GRAIL encourages this committee to use SB348 to support the community living and civil rights of all aging Kansans and Kansans with disabilities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present our perspectives on SB348.