

Kris Carlson

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To: Kris Carlson
Cc:
Subject: testify
Attachments:

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Greeting, legislators and all here interested in taking care of those Montanans who need just a little help to stay in their homes despite their physical limitations.

As you consider the personal care programs in Montana, please remember the following facts:

The last time personal care agencies received a raise was from the 1997⁷⁶ (8 years ago) legislature. A wage initiative was offered in 99 but those monies went directly into the caregivers pockets. Although we supported that measure, raising our employees wages actually cost us money in additional payroll taxes that further cut into our bottom line.

The profit margins in this business has put many (most?) personal care agencies out of business. To cope with higher expenses, those agencies that have survived have had to cut costs. These cuts have resulted in lower levels of service for not only the persons receiving services, but the caregivers providing services. Few agencies now offer 24 on call services to adjust schedules due to illness, etc. Every time a caregiver is unable to provide services to a recipient, that patient is at risk.

In 99 when our caregivers received their last raise, the funds were appropriated in order to help retain these employees. Shortly after that due to lack of funds, mileage reimbursement was dropped to an embarrassing 13cents/mile, and shift times were shortened to spread the care to cover more people. Today some of our clients who live 10 or 20 miles from town receive 2 or 3 visits weekly for an hour or hour and a half at a time. Imagine if you were a caregiver, you might need 12 hours to get 8 hours worth of work- and have to drive 200 miles (at your own expense). As the job of personal caregiver becomes less stable, and less financially rewarding, retention becomes a problem- increasing the costs for the provider agencies.

Why even continue this program? First, people helping people stay living in there own homes is worthy. When people are forced to move into a nursing home, not only can their self worth diminish, but our state picks up an even larger bill. Second, the personal care program is an important piece of economic development. When we provide services in Libby, Troy, Browning, Havre, or Sidney, the largest share of the reimbursement to agencies goes directly into wages. Minimal amounts are spent on equipment or capital expense, the money goes to gas stations and grocery stores. And almost 3 of 4 dollars we spend are reimbursed by the Feds.

In summary, the personal care program provides excellent economic development for rural communities- federally subsidized jobs and a valuable tool to minimize the expense of caring for debilitated Montanans.

Respectfully submitted,

Kris Carlson RN, MBA.