



March 18, 2011

Re: HB 2; Public Testimony for Senate Finance and Claims

Dear Chairman Lewis and Senators of the Senate Finance and Claims Committee,

I first want to express my sincerest apologies that I am not able to appear before the committee in person today. Personal assistance availability and a broken wheelchair has made it necessary for me to return to Missoula for a couple of days.

The purpose of my testimony today is in relation to a program that is very near and dear to me as well as to many of the consumers we at Montana's Centers for Independent Living provide services for. That is the Medicaid personal assistance program.

The Medicaid personal assistance program is a program that provides in-home long-term care supports of the most basic and essential type. These supports provide help with basic but essential life tasks such as assistance with going to the bathroom, taking a shower, getting dressed, getting in and out of bed, and assistance in preparing and eating meals, that people with disabilities and seniors who are on this program are unable to do on their own. In short, when Grandma or Grandpa can no longer do some of these things on their own and need a little assistance, this is the program they rely on if they are on Medicaid. This is also the program that people with disabilities rely on just to have life, not to mention have quality of life or a life where they can be participating members of their communities and even become tax paying workers.

The only other option where individuals in need of assistance of life's most basic tasks can receive these services is in an institution or nursing home, which contribute nothing to quality of life or a life that allows one to participate in their community or to gain or maintain employment. Not to mention these alternative options cost taxpayers more.

I, personally and on behalf of Montana's Centers for Independent Living, ask and urge this committee to NOT reduce these services even further than they already have been (showers were reduced to 3/week in 2003) in years past. Us individuals who rely on these services already only get the minimum level of services we need. I ask this committee to restore the 2.22% funding reduction that was included in the 5% reductions. If this reduction remains, meal preparation services would be reduced to a maximum of 4 hours per week or 1/3 of a person's allotted time. At 4 hours/week, that would mean approximately 11.5 minutes per meal.

Please restore this funding.

Best Regards,

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