

February 6, 2023

Public Comment for House Bill 2 – Health & Human Services

Long-Term Care Funding

- Fund the Medicaid provider rate at the cost of business in the Guidehouse Study.
<https://dphhs.mt.gov/assets/ProviderRateStudy/Reports/FinalMTNursingFacilityRateStudyReport.pdf>

In order for Montana to address the state's long-term / senior care crisis, we need to fund provider rates at the level the Guidehouse Study recommended: we will continue to face staffing shortages if our long-term health care providers are not paid a competitive wage. We need to support Montana providers who've been in this work for decades. We need to properly fund and support Montana workers. If we do not, Montana families will continue to struggle to find local, affordable long-term care. 11 nursing homes and counting closed already. That means Montanans parents and grandparents are shuttled further and further away from family as their community nursing homes close down. Rural communities rely on these facilities.

My adult son is severely mentally ill. Dedicated workers should not have to sacrifice their health and financial security and that of their families caring for MT's most vulnerable people. Vulnerable Montanans need to be cared for in their homes, and communities, by friends and neighbors close to their loved ones. Vulnerable Montanans should not have to leave their communities and homes to get the care they need.

The administration should immediately engage the public, providers, and families in the Governor's plan for mental health. MT has a mental health crisis and a crisis with nursing homes closing. In order for Montana to address these tragedies we need to fund a competitive wage. If we do not, Montanans will struggle to find affordable and accessible mental health care.

Democrats fought for increases in Medicaid services and provider rates. The Governor said, no, we need to study the obvious instead and base decisions on data. He ignores the data and his budget underfunded the cost of providing care by tens of millions of dollars. Now the decision is in the legislature's hands. Nursing homes and mental health providers have closed their doors leaving vulnerable people and their families out in the cold. We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to solve the problem. Let's do it. Fund Medicaid providers at the rate in the study. No less.

-Gail Waldby

- "Public Hearing on Long Term Care funding

We need to support Montana providers who've been in this work for decades. We need to properly fund and support Montana workers. If we do not, Montana families will continue to struggle to find local, affordable long-term care."

-Terri Nelson

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- Please fund the Medicaid provider rates at the level in the Guide House study. Please base decisions on data and pay providers the real cost of doing business.

Vulnerable people need to be cared for in their homes, and communities, by friends and neighbors close to their loved ones. They should not have to leave their communities and homes to get the care they need.

MT has a mental health crisis and a crisis with nursing homes closing. In order for Montana to address these tragedies we need to fund a competitive wage. If we do not, Montanans will struggle to find affordable and accessible mental health care.”

-Karen Sheets

- “My father has been a resident in the Auberge Assisted Living Home in Missoula. Over the last few years, the care has deteriorated immensely as workers are hard to find and people in administrative positions come and go. The reduced number and overturn of workers causes lack of continuity. We need this bill to keep our long-term care going. Workers need to be paid a decent wage.”

-Bonita Reishus

- “Public Hearing on Long Term Care funding

Before passing short term tax breaks we need to fund Long Term Care.

For Montana to address the states long-term / senior care crisis, we need to fund provider rates at least at the level the Guidehouse Study recommended: we will continue to face staffing shortages if our long-term health care providers are not paid a competitive wage.”

-Terri Nelson

- “My mother-in-law was in a long-term care facility from 2017 until 12/2019. We visited her regularly and spoke with other family members of patients there. Some were really struggling with their finances. This bill will help Montana families during a very difficult time.”

-Walter Rowntree

- “Hello, my name is Keith Blaylock, I live in Kalispell, MT. I believe that workers who work very hard to provide essential specialty care services should be adequately funded at least to Guidehouse Incs recommendation of targeting reimbursement rates for physicians and mid-level practitioners at the 2019 levels of 105 percent of Medicare. I would also like to see an additional funding increase to offset the cost of living increase experienced by all Montana citizens since 2019. We are losing health care funded services and workers all across Montana and we cannot afford to continue down this track of irresponsible under funding. When this happens, people who need the care have to go out of state, and that process further reduces Montana’s ability to provide essential care. Families cannot afford to continue the loss of care facilities and nursing homes because elderly people need to be cared for in areas near where

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their families live. Funding our in-place systems with an acceptable amount of funding to meet the current needs of our communities is the right thing to do.

Please fund these programs as needed it is your legislative responsibility and duty.

Thank you.”

-Keith Blaylock

Mental Health Services

- I serve on the Kalispell City Council, though I am only commenting on behalf of myself personally.

A lack of adequate funding for mental health services has resulted in the closing of our local mental health facility and a lack of resources for other mental health services locally. This has resulted in a crisis in our community with a rapid deterioration in the mental health for some of our most vulnerable residents, including members of our homeless population. Local businesses and other residents are experiencing the effects of this crisis with increasingly difficult behavior being exhibited by those with mental health challenges in our community. It is falling on our already stretched thin law enforcement to deal with consequences of untreated mental illness. I can't stress enough how critical the situation is in our community.

In addition, we have experienced a spike youth suicides in our community in recent years. We must do more to help our teens and veterans struggling with mental health challenges.

For these reasons, I urge you to support funding Medicaid provider rates at the level in the Guide House study and to increase funding through marijuana sales revenue for the HEART program. Thank you.

-Ryan Hunter

- “It’s important that the administration immediately engage the public, providers and families in the Governor’s plan for mental health.

Dear Committee Members, Thank you for your service.

Due to Montana's mental health crisis and a crisis with nursing homes, we need to fund a competitive wage, if we do not, Montanans will struggle to find affordable and accessible mental health care.”

-Shelley Eisenrich

- “Our community is being disrupted by many people who need mental health services. Please set the funding at adequate levels.”

-Laura Reynolds

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- “HB2, Public Hearing on Mental Health Funding and Elderly long-term care (nursing homes). I just skimmed the Report from Guide House Study on fiscal spending for Medicaid and Medicare in Montana compared to Wa., Id., Wy., N.Dak., S. Dak.,. Heavy reading but my surmise is Montana is behind on living wages for those who care for this vulnerable population. The Governor is jilting this group by tens of millions! Not right! If rich people are the only recipients of the States surplus a sad society for all. Thank-you. for listening.”

-Colleen Hinds

- “As a city councilor of Kalispell, I see the effects on our community when mental health and addiction services are bereft in our community. We need Medicaid/Medicare funding that will support these services at a rate that will allow our providers to give care to our most marginalized members of our community without taking a loss. If the providers work at a loss then services will not be available. We are in desperate need of more providers with their services. We must compensate them in a manner that does not put them at a loss so we can reach those who need the help the most. We need more providers and if they cannot be compensated at a rate that puts them in the green then we will lose out on much needed services and we will not attract providers to get the services into our communities. Please support increasing the funds to keep these services in our communities.”

-Jessica Ann Dahlman

- “The state is in an absolute crisis of mental health and substance abuse. We need more funding in this area and this bill will provide it.”

-Walter Rowntree

- “MT has a mental health crisis and a crisis with nursing homes closing. In order for Montana to address these tragedies we need to fund a competitive wage. If we do not, Montanans will struggle to find affordable and accessible mental health care.”

-Terri Nelson

- “I have been a social worker in the Flathead for 15 years. For 10 years, I worked at Western Montana Mental Health. For the past 4 years, I have been the Co-founder and Executive Director of the Flathead Warming Center (low-barrier homeless shelter). I have witnessed our local mental health resources dry up after the 2017 Medicaid Reimbursement Rate cuts for mental health adult case management services. Case management has disappeared and our entire community is suffering as a result! I have seen severely ill individuals go from having case management services, being medicated, and stable in our community to now, without case management services and a place to stabilize, these same individuals are homeless, unmedicated, no mental health support system, and wondering our streets and other public places. Those struggling with severe and disabling mental illness MUST have the one-on-one caring relationship with a professional in our community to navigate life with mental illness and to regain stability when symptoms of their mental illness become acute. Currently, case management does not exist for a large percentage of the mentally ill population and when their

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life falls apart, we no longer have mental health crisis stabilization facilities for people to go to become well. A crisis stabilization house in the Flathead has been CLOSED for over a year! Without the resources needed in our community for individuals to be well, as a community, we have no other option but to pass individuals between shelters, the emergency room, law enforcement, and jail. Again, and Again and Again. This is INSANITY! And is EXPENSIVE! I must paint a picture of how the lack of case management services and crisis stabilization care is being played out in our community. We have mentally ill individuals who have lost limbs due to severe frostbite. Our community could not help them! We have individuals released from the Montana State Hospital directly back into homelessness, dropped at the shelter door without a connection to services, because case management no longer exists! One such individual, discharged from the State Hospital, dropped in our local community, without local mental health care, dealing with extreme psychosis, cut off his entire genitalia in the Warming Center bathroom! The condition and void of mental health services in our Montana communities is extreme! When those with severe and disabling mental illness have difficulty getting even their basic needs met, it comes out sideways and is ugly. We are seeing dangerous and poor behaviors in local parks and throughout the community. We do not have the crisis stabilization facilities nor space in the jail, so these individuals are not being helped nor held accountable for their dangerous and disruptive behaviors within our community! Again, they are being passed around. What is now being played out in our public spaces is the direct result of case management services and crisis stabilization being nonexistent. I fear we are not even seeing the worst yet! Case Management services is absolutely vital to a community's health and safety! PLEASE HELP Montana communities to have healthy local mental health services! PLEASE bring back an appropriate Medicaid reimbursement rate for all mental health services! And please do it as SOON as you can. This is a good starting point; just a starting point!!!! We are in dire need!!!!!!”

-Tonya Horn

Disability Services

- My name is Robert Jaquiss, and I represent the National Federation of the Blind of Montana. The National Federation of the Blind of Montana is in support of HB2 specifically the Montana State Library. We wish to make three points:
 - We wish to publicly thank the Montana State Library for funding NFB-NEWSLINE during the 2021-2022 biennium. We intend to continue partnering with MTBL regardless of which agency funds NFB-NEWSLINE.
 - We have been informed that the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Blind and Low Vision Services plans to fund NFB-NEWSLINE for the 2023-2024 biennium.
 - The National Federation of the Blind of Montana asks that the legislature fund the State Library and specifically the Talking Book Service. The Talking Book Service is the only source for talking books for blind Montanans.

Thank you for your consideration.

-Robert S. Jaquiss

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HEART Fund

- “This would use some of the revenue from Marijuana sales to fund behavioral health, including substance abuse treatment

We need to make investments in child and adult behavioral health, mental health, substance abuse because the state is facing a crisis

Dedicated workers should not have to sacrifice their health and that of their families caring for MTs most vulnerable people.

Vulnerable people need to be cared for in their homes, and communities, by friends and neighbors close to their loved ones.

They should not have to leave their communities and homes to get the care they need.”

-Terri Nelson