

Bill: HB-2: General Appropriations Act 2021-01-21 08:00 AM - (H) JAS on Health and Human Services

Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: No

Organization: N/A

Name: George Northcutt Jr.

Email: [shycpat3148@gmail.com](mailto:shycpat3148@gmail.com)

Phone: (406) 403-4213

City, State: Great Falls

Written Statement: My name is George Northcutt. I currently reside at the Ivy. I am willing to stay in this Ivy nursing home during the Covid lockdown of nursing homes. I want to live in my own apartment again. It's really hard to figure out Covid 19 but my spend down issues make it hard for me to become eligible for Medicaid in the Community. Now not only do we have to worry about climbing Covid cases, but I want to be free from COVID worries and the nursing home.

Bill: HB-2: General Appropriations Act 2021-01-22 08:00 AM - (H) JAS on Health and Human Services

Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes

Organization: North Central Independent Living Services

Name: Shyla Patera

Email: [spatera@ncils.org](mailto:spatera@ncils.org)

Phone: (406) 452-9834

City, State: Black Eagle

Written Statement: My name is Shyla Patera. I am employed by and represent North Central Independent Services based in Black Eagle, Montana. As an Independent Living Specialist, I have helped people advocate to keep their Home and Community Services as well as our Community First Choice packages and funding strong so that many north central Montanans can stay in their own homes. As a Montanan with a disability, I have benefitted from past advocacy across DPHHS divisions particularly from the creation of the self directed PAS program, community first choice, and Montana Medicaid for Workers with Disabilities. It is often noted that advocates for funding of disability services often utilize the sports analogy of playing offensive or defensive ball. In truth, though, every budget and service package request DPHHS senior and long term care makes and every vote you take as legislators will transform not only funding for programs but also how a Montana Senior or Montanan with a disability lives their life in our Montana communities.

Bill: HB-2: General Appropriations Act 2021-01-20 08:00 AM - (H) JAS on Health and Human Services

Position: Opponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes

Organization: Montana Primary Care Association

Name: Stacey J Anderson

Email: [sanderson@mtpca.org](mailto:sanderson@mtpca.org)

Phone: (406) 442-4228

City, State: Helena

Written Statement: MPCA opposes the starting point motion.



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January 18, 2021

Dear Montana Legislators:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of HB 2 which includes the Senior Long Term Care Division and Medicaid budgets for assisted living facilities. I can not stress to you enough the importance of maintaining and increasing the budgets for assisted living facilities through Medicaid reimbursements. This increase in funding goes directly to support many economically disadvantaged elders in our rural communities get the direct daily care they need to live their lives. In addition, this funding also then supports a rural community by paying the wages of our employees and purchasing services and supplies for the facility.

Assisted Living Facilities are not skilled nursing facilities like nursing homes, yet they are the backbone for providing elders with daily care needs – such as assistance with bathing, medications, mobility, dressing, grooming, toileting, meals, and in some cases we assist with dementia. **We do this essential work 24 hours a day in a safe and nurturing environment, under stressful conditions and we do it at half the cost of nursing homes.** Assisted living facilities are the best answer for many of our elders as they enter the final stages of life; yet the overwhelming majority of those elders need Medicaid to help them pay for this care. If they are unable to get on the Medicaid Housing Waiver and move into an assisted living facility, they end up staying at home, neglected, unable to care for themselves, and live in a continuous unsafe situation until a medical emergency requires them to move into a nursing home.

The past year of COVID brought us new struggles with old problems; staffing remains my most serious issue and when my facility contracted COVID, I was left with three staff members to care round-the-clock for 12 residents who were in quarantine, sick, and scared. We were fortunate to come through the outbreak without a death and only one hospitalization; but we know without the care of the staff things would have been very different. As essential workers our employees deserve a living wage to support them and their families. The additional Medicaid Housing Waiver funds have been crucial to keeping the limited staff we have and paying them appropriately for their work. Additional costs for PPE and other supplies to keep residents safe and healthy only increase our daily costs to care for an elder.

**With the Medicaid Housing Waiver increase from last spring, we are able to accept more elders into our facilities because their Medicaid reimbursement is closer to covering the actual costs associated with providing them care. This additional funding for 2020 and 2021 MUST continue if assisted living facilities are to continue taking and caring for these elders, and further increases in funding would enable us to serve even more elders receiving Medicaid benefits.**

Please take the honorable and necessary step to increase the budgets for Senior Long Term Care Division and Medicaid so that we can continue to serve our elderly at their most vulnerable. Our work and their lives depend upon it.

Sincerely,



Laura Simpson, Administrator  
Renaissance Senior Care – Deer Lodge

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Position: Opponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: No

Organization: N/A

Name: Ford Allison

Email: [ford@teamsvc.com](mailto:ford@teamsvc.com)

Phone: (303) 808-4175

City, State: Hardin MT

Written Statement: Dear Appropriations Subcommittee members, I work with Circle of Life home care, which serves more than 1300 individuals across seven western states, including citizens of Hardin and Lame Deer. We are a personal assistance provider organization, providing in-home care to people with disabilities and the elderly through Montana's Home and Community-Based Waiver program (Medicaid). These individuals are supported in their homes and the community through the effort of long term service and support (LTSS) caregivers.

I am writing to convey to you the importance of continued funding for these Home and Community-Based Service programs within the Department of Human Services budget for 2021. Throughout the COVID-19 emergency, our agency was successful in maintaining these individuals in their homes, and our continued care ensured that they avoided overburdening hospitals and nursing facilities.

We are counting on you to advocate for the constituents in your districts and for these programs in your role on the Department of Human Service's Appropriations Subcommittee. Without Home and Community-based programs, many of these individuals would end up in costlier settings such as hospitals or nursing facilities. It is important to support these valuable programs, as they are a fraction of costlier institutional alternatives and maintain your constituents where they want to be—in their homes and community.

Not only does our Home Care Agency serve clients, we also provide jobs for caregivers who choose to do this thankless work. The Montana economy will improve faster with greater employment. Our service is doubly important to the state in providing jobs in local communities and in saving Medicaid dollars by avoiding higher cost settings.

There are several ways for you to advocate for your constituents to ensure continued levels of funding for the most vulnerable and these programs in Montana's budget:

- 1) Promote and preserve the maximum amount of funding to Personal Assistance Services in budgets submitted by Montana's Department of Human Services, a. This funding also maximizes federal matching dollars.
- 2) Pursue opportunities for federal dollars to stabilize Montana's budget.
  - a. Redefining more flexibility from CARES Act funds for states to use their existing federal dollars to pay for lost revenues.
  - b. Advocating for increasing the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) to 12% above non-pandemic funding levels.

We very much appreciate your time and service for the citizens of Montana. We would be happy to discuss with you further.

Thank you,

Ford Allison  
Policy Leader

Bill: HB-2: General Appropriations Act 2021-01-22 08:00 AM - (H) JAS on Health and Human Services

Position: Opponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes

Organization: Behavioral Health Alliance of Montana

Name: Mary Windecker

Email: [mwindecker@montanabehavioralhealth.org](mailto:mwindecker@montanabehavioralhealth.org)

Phone: (406) 546-4793

City, State: Missoula

Written Statement: We are opposed to cuts to any DPHHS programs other than internal cuts due to the 2017-2018 community-based behavioral health cuts that decimated our mental health and substance use programs.

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Position: Informational Witness

Representing an Entity/Another Person: No

Organization: N/A

Name: Marsha Katz

Email: [adaptmt@aol.com](mailto:adaptmt@aol.com)

Phone: (406) 829-9495

City, State: Missoula, MT

Written Statement: Dear Members of the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services,

I am writing in support of greatly increased funding for Community First Choice, Personal Assistance Services, Big Sky Waiver, and other long-term care programs administered by Senior and Long Term Care within DPHHS for the following reasons;

As you are no doubt aware, Montana positive Covid cases are approaching nearly 10% of our population. There is no end in sight, even with the prospect of vaccinating the general public (hopefully.)

And a worse statistic is that nearly 40% of our Montana Covid deaths are people who were in nursing homes and assisted living facilities, also known as congregate care facilities. This statistic is pretty uniform across the country. While some of us have advocated repeatedly and for many years for a cost effective investment in more home and community based services, state and federal governments have persisted in providing more support to more costly institutions and underfunding what home and community based services are provided.

This past year, the Coronavirus pandemic has illustrated in a frightening and deadly fashion just how unwise it has been to keep supporting congregate care settings and underfunding home and community based services. By the second week of December of 2020, the Great Falls Tribune was reporting that, "Montana ranks second in the nation for the highest rate of nursing home resident deaths due to COVID-19, according to a Thursday report from the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). "

One of the simplest and best and most cost effective ways to prevent these deaths is to shift from congregate care to more home and community based care. It is also what people want, and what most families want. How many Montanans are regularly shipped to nursing homes miles from home, family and friends because their small community does not have a facility there, and the state does not provide them appropriate home and community services? Brown University has done research on the number of people who end up in nursing homes simply because they have no one to prepare meals for them. These people are called low-care. How many people have died of Covid in nursing homes just for lack of someone to prepare their meals?

This will not be the last pandemic or contagious disease we experience. If the state of Montana wants to reduce and prevent deaths of our citizens from flu, viruses, contagious infections, etc. it is imperative to increase home and community based services funding, including funding for Community First Choice, Personal Assistance Services, Big Sky Waiver, and other long-term care programs administered by Senior and along Term Care within DPHHS.

By starting your deliberations for the 2023 biennium budget using 2019 numbers, you are starting from a point of drastically cutting funding. Instead you need to be increasing the SLTC funding to levels that can keep people home where they want to be, at less cost to taxpayers, and where they can protect themselves from being exposed to things that can kill them. Funding home and community based services also creates jobs in the community instead of lining the pockets of the corporations and people that own nursing homes. Those jobs provide people with income to pay rent and mortgages, feed their families, and spend their paychecks in their community, thus supporting the local economy.

Home and community based services are a win for individuals, a win for their families, a win for their community, a win for the state. I urge you to adequately fund SLTC, and begin your negotiations at the 2021 biennium levels, then increasing the funding from there.

Thank you,  
Marsha Katz

My name is Amy Fiel and I am writing you on behalf of my niece, Madison. In March 2016, when Madison was a 20-year-old college student, she was involved in a motor vehicle accident. My brother, her dad, arrived at the hospital just in time to see her for a minute as she was being flown to Billings for emergency surgery. Having sustained a severe head trauma, she was unrecognizable to him, and he was told to prepare for the worst as she had very little chance of surviving. After spending months in a coma, her prognosis remained grim, with little hope of ever walking, talking, reading, writing, or eating again. Despite several months in the ICU and many more at an inpatient rehabilitation facility, we finally brought her home to Montana where she has continued to amaze her family and medical providers. The most significant long-term effect of her traumatic brain injury is severe anterograde amnesia. What this means is that Madison has no sense of time. She doesn't know if it's Sunday or Friday, if it's 10 AM or 11 PM. She could see you every day for a year and every time would be like the first time for her. She would greet you with a smile and warm compliment, but would not remember having ever met you, your name, or how you fit into her life. She can't remember if she's eaten her breakfast or brushed her teeth, where she put her coat, or where she lives. As I'm sure you can imagine, this leaves Madison incredibly vulnerable in the world, and she requires supervision and care 24 hours a day and has not been left alone in nearly 5 years.

But none of this is what you would remember about her if she could testify in front of you herself today. What you would remember is that she is bright, funny, and kind. You would remember the way she made you feel grateful for what you thought was a "bad hair day" when she tells you how much she likes it and to "walk around with confidence." You'd marvel that someone so impaired could be filled with so much joy and vitality, because she is all of those things. She is a bright, funny, kind, and vital part of her family and the community around her.

Assistants help her with basic activities of daily living like dressing, bathing, laundry, and meal prep. They make her medical appointments and escort her to and from her appointments, including speech, occupational, and physical therapy. With the help of personal assistants, Madison is also able to maintain as much socialization and community involvement as possible by participating in therapeutic recreation with community-based organizations, such as Eagle Mount. There she gardens, goes for hikes, swims, and even learned how to horseback ride – admittedly her new favorite activity. It is challenging to find and keep personal assistants because the pay is far below a living wage and the care demanding. The extensive budget cuts proposed to the SLTC program would be devastating to Madison and other disabled and elderly Montanans who rely on these programs.

The current and ongoing pandemic has been challenging for many in our country, but it has been devastating to the most vulnerable among us – the disabled and elderly. It is unconscionable that the governor and your committee would even consider cutting funding to this population when they need it the most. Many are no longer able to rely on neighbors, family members, and community organizations because of COVID. Caregivers often have multiple clients making protecting everyone that much more challenging. The proposed cuts will certainly result in lost services and reduced wages for workers – threatening the very survival of our disabled and elderly community members. This is unacceptable. We have a

moral obligation to care for them. How we treat them, is a direct reflection of what we value, and Madison reminds me every day that it is an honor to care for her, not a burden. I implore you to restore funding to the SLTC budget so that the most vulnerable receive the services and care they require and deserve and are not discarded as some second-rate citizens.