January 14, 2025

Dear Washington State Legislature,

This year, the Washington State Legislature can make a huge impact in the lives of developmentally disabled children and their families by making natural, adoptive, and stepparents of children under the age of 18 eligible to be employed caregivers.

In Washington State, Medicaid eligible children under the age of 18 who require caregiver support to live safely in the community cannot choose to hire their natural, adoptive, or step-parents to be paid for their caregiving labor. However, Medicaid eligible adults over the age of 18 **can** hire their natural, adoptive, or step-parents to be their paid caregiver.

Because of the well-documented caregiver workforce shortage and the pervasive lack of adequate accommodations in childcare and school settings, parenting a developmentally disabled child means that a parent must often leave the workforce to provide this necessary care unpaid. Caregiving continues to be seen as "women's work" and is often unseen, undervalued, and deprioritized. Further, this policy restriction leaves single parents, women of color, poor people and families experiencing language access barriers uniquely exposed to the financial burdens of caring for a child with disabilities.

#### HB 1200/SB 5211

The Employ Parent Caregiver bill expands the caregiver workforce to include parents of minor children. It defines "parent" as a natural, adoptive, step-parent or legal guardian. The bill requires all hours worked by a parent provider to be moved onto Home and Community Based Service waivers under the Developmental Disabilities Administration. The same training, oversight and requirements will be applied to parent providers of minor children as is applied to parent providers of adult children now.

Employing parents doesn't add new services. It simply expands the caregiver workforce which has been insufficient to meet the care needs of children for many years. 41% of children's personal care hours go unspent each year due to the pervasive lack of eligible caregivers. The state sees the increased utilization of children's care hours as an added budget request of \$25 million state cost. HB 1200/SB 5211 includes an extended implementation timeline beginning with only the

E and High B categories of children with a \$9 million yearly state cost. All categories of eligible children will be included by 2031.

# **Example hypothetical**

8-year-old Toby is assessed by DDA to need 200 hours per month of extraordinary caregiving support. The legislature must provide the funds so Toby can receive 200 hours per month of paid caregiving support on the Community First Choice state plan. However, since Toby's parents cannot hire an eligible caregiver, Toby's parents must deliver all his extraordinary caregiving support **unpaid**. The funds allocated for 200 hours per month for Toby's care is placed into the state's general fund to be spent elsewhere. Since the state budgets off prior utilization, the legislature will decrease the following year's budget for in-home care in expectation that Toby will not utilize his 200 hours again. Toby's mom would like to be employed as his caregiver to provide 40 hours per week as a HCBS waiver service.

# **Example hypothetical**

15-year-old Tory is assessed by DDA to need 200 hours per month of extraordinary caregiving support. The Legislature must provide the funds so Tory can receive this 200 hours of in-home support on the Community First Choice state plan. However, since Tory's parents can only hire a caregiver for 100 hours per month, Tory's parents would like to be employed for the remaining 100 hours per month as a HCBS waiver service.

# **Talking Points**

- We ask the state to extend employment eligibility to parents of minors as they
  do for parents of adults providing direct care support to their children
- The state already allocates funds for disabled children but 1.4 million hours go unspent each year due to the lack of eligible caregivers
- Parents are the most knowledgeable and safest caregivers for their children and deserve employment eligibility for the skilled care they provide
- Disabled children face limited access to childcare and school settings leaving a disproportionate burden on parents who often leave the workforce to provide their child's extraordinary care needs.
- Children deserve the right to choose their 'provider of choice' and access the care services they need to live in their community instead of an institution

We, the undersigned, ask you to address this injustice in the upcoming legislative session by passing HB 1200/SB 5211





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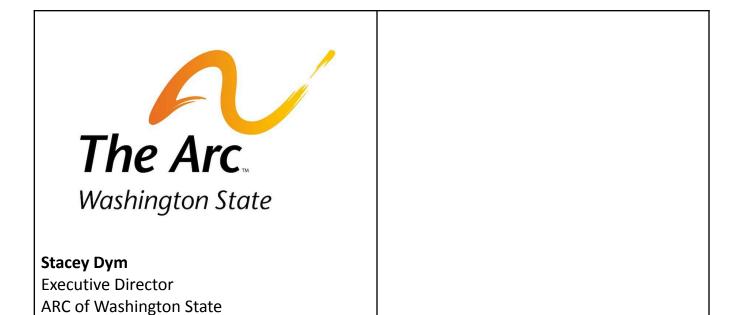
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# Employing Parent Caregivers Bill- Individual Supporters: 896 signatures and growing Sign the petition HERE