

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



Ginger Kwan
Executive Director
Open Doors for Multicultural Families



Fernanda Mazcot
Executive Director
Nuestras Raíces



Hodan Mohammad
Executive Director
Washington Multicultural Services Link



Katie Schied
Co-Founder
Parents Empowering Parents



Lauren Hipp
National Director, Early Childhood and
Washington State
MomsRising/MamasConPoder



Adana Protonentis
Co-Founder
Kindred Consulting



Darla Helt
Executive Director
People Empowered and Communities
Enhanced



Maddie Foutch
Director of Public Affairs
SEIU 775



Michelle O'Dell
Coordinator
Thurston County DD Coalition



Sima Thorpe
Chief Executive Officer
The Arc of Spokane



Jeff Meeks
Executive Director
The Arc of Grays Harbor



Tracy Kahlo
Executive Director
PAVE



Pam Blanton
Executive Director
Partners 4 Housing



Ramona Hattendorf
Interim Executive Director
The Arc of King County



Jamie Coonts
Executive Director
The Arc of Snohomish County



Abbie Altamirano
Community Engagement & Advocacy Manager
Families of Color Seattle



Max Brown
Founder
NW Rare Disease Coalition



David Wu
President and CEO
Special Olympics of Washington State



Carolina Sommer
Founder/CEO/President
Born a Hero Foundation



Jeff Poltawsky
President
Mary Bridge Children's Hospital



Eric Holzapfel
Interim Co-CEO
League of Education Voters Foundation



Ken Maaz
CEO
Ashley House Northwest



Jeremy A. Kredlo
Founder
Fierce Advocacy LLC



Kristina Smith
Founder / Parent Caregiver Life Coach
Kindred Joy Coaching



Nelson Rascon
Executive Director
Dads MOVE



Erica Moshe
Executive Director
The Brave Warrior Project



Julie German-Murrey
Co-Founder & Director
Rosalie Murrey Memorial Foundation



Jennifer M. Allen (She/Her)
Chief Executive Officer
Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates - Washington



Mayra Colazo
Executive Director
Central Washington Disability Resources

SAFE HAVEN Guardianship Agency

Lynda Clark
Owner
Safe Haven Guardianship Agency



Lauren Platt
Executive Director of Government and State Affairs
Providence Sacred Heart Children's Hospital



Betty Schwieterman
Office of Developmental Disabilities Ombuds
State Developmental Disabilities Ombuds



Stacey Dym
Executive Director
ARC of Washington State

Employing Parent Caregivers Bill- Individual Supporters:

896 signatures and growing

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