

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5821

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, February 19, 2001

Title: An act relating to wage increase for direct care workers in long-term care service.

Brief Description: Providing a wage increase for direct care workers in long-term care service.

Sponsors: Senators Kohl-Welles, Deccio and Rasmussen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 2/15/01, 2/19/01 [DP-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Franklin, Vice Chair; Costa, Deccio, Fraser, Parlette and Winsley.

Staff: Rhoda Donkin (786-7198)

Background: People who are born with disabilities or become disabled, and those who reach a point in their lives when they cannot take care of themselves, may turn to long-term care services. The care they receive will be basic daily assistance, help with eating, dressing, moving, and personal hygiene. The longer people are disabled, and the older they get, the more likely their chronic condition will prevent them from working. If their income and assets drop low enough, and their needs are significant, the state will pay for their long-term care.

The individuals who provide this basic, non-medical care to the chronically disabled are not typically highly trained. While handling the needs of a quadriplegic, a person with no memory, or someone who simply needs to be lifted to the bathroom regularly, may be challenging both physically and emotionally, the work has never achieved the status of a health profession. This means that training, compensation, and advancement opportunities for people who work as caregivers are minimal.

Typically, compensation for care giving hovers around minimum wage. Today, home care workers and aides in adult family homes and boarding homes are paid about \$7.18 per hour. The wages are slightly higher in nursing homes. The responsibilities of the job and the low wages are blamed for a turnover rate among caregivers of about 60 percent annually.

It is projected that as baby boomers age, the need for caregivers will grow dramatically. There is concern that demand for workers at this level of care will go drastically unmet if compensation and other opportunities don't increase. There is also concern that quality care is unsustainable and will erode to unsafe conditions if the industry cannot attract a dependable committed workforce.

Summary of Bill: Compensation for all unlicensed direct care workers who provide state funded long-term care in any long-term care setting, including homes, whose hourly wage is \$9 or less per hour as of June 30, 2001, receive \$1 per hour increase starting July 1, 2001.

Compensation for all unlicensed direct care workers who provide state funded long-term care in services for the developmentally disabled, whose hourly wage is \$9 or less per hour as of June 30, 2001, receive a \$1 per hour increase starting July 1, 2001.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: If we don't pay these workers a livable wage, the quality of long-term care will disintegrate. This is hard work and committed workers are hard to find. Paying better wages will help stop the very high turnover rate.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Jim Morris, Resident Council Fred Lind (pro); Hilke Faber, Founder Resident Councils of WA (pro); Sylvia Fuerstenberg, Community Residential Services (pro w/amendments); Rob Negergill, guardian, brother (pro w/amendments); Tony Far, Laurie Dunbar, Jim St. George, Pat Worley, Community Living, Yakima (pro w/amendments); Bill Day, Adult Family Home Assn. (pro); Cecile Henault, WA State Assn. of Home Care Services (pro); Peter Nazzal, Catholic Community Services (pro w/concerns); Kat Overman, OPEW Local 8 (pro); Jim Oliver, NW Parkinson Foundation (pro w/amendments); Ellie Merges (pro); Bruce Reeves, DD Council (pro); Kary Hyre, LTC Ombudsman (pro); Dennis Mahar, W4A (pro).