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April 19, 2019

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Bill Improving Home Care Worker Wages Passes Senate Hearing

The Bill Raises Wages for Caregivers and Establishes a Training Enforcement Work Group to Promote High Care Standards for Consumers

Denver, CO – [Senate Bill 238](#), sponsored by Senators Jessie Danielson and Dominick Moreno and Representatives Chris Kennedy and Monica Duran, passed out of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee yesterday with a 3-2 vote. The bill aims to improve retention in the home care workforce by requiring home care agencies to pass on a minimum percentage of their Medicaid reimbursement rate increases over the next two fiscal years directly to employee compensation. SB 238 also establishes a stakeholder group to create a process for reviewing and enforcing training requirements and ensuring workers are aware of the rights they earned under this bill.

The bill was praised by consumer Paul Delay, who believes it's critical a caregiver can provide for her own family while taking care of his.

"My daughter became paraplegic after a car accident and needed a caregiver to help her with things I couldn't do for her, like doing her hair, helping her with makeup, or just being there for her as a friend," Delay said. "My daughter became very close to her caregiver. She was devastated when one day her caregiver told her she had to get a different job because she didn't make enough to support herself and her family. She loved my daughter, and my daughter loved her, but she was in tears because her job didn't pay enough for her to continue doing what she loved."

Home care workers help people who have trouble with activities of daily living to stay in their homes, living an independent and dignified life. Home care also saves taxpayer money on long term care. [According to one study](#), "on average, the Medicaid program can provide Home and Community Based Services to three people for the cost of serving one person in a nursing home." As Colorado's population ages we are facing an increased demand for personal care aides. Colorado's population over 65 is expected to [increase by about 150](#) percent in the next decade and demand for home care workers is expected to [increase by 45 percent](#) by 2026.

"Right now, across Colorado, there are thousands of people who depend on home care workers to live in their homes, independently and with dignity," said bill sponsor Sen. Jessie Danielson. "We are facing a shortage of workers and Colorado needs to find ways to fill these positions. The way to address this crisis is to improve wages for home care workers, who want to be in the profession because they love their clients but are having a hard time making ends meet as cost of living increases while wages stay stagnant."

Home care workers struggle to provide for their own families: wages are low compared to the cost of living and most caregivers don't get sick leave or paid time off. Increasing wages will help retain workers who are dedicated to providing high quality, compassionate care. SB 238 requires agencies to apply the entire provider rate increase for FY 19/20 (\$1.48/hour) to worker compensation and sets a wage floor for

home care workers of \$12.41, starting in July 2020. As part of “Compensation” the bill includes wages, payroll taxes, unemployment insurance, and other employer costs.

“We need a way to retain workers, because this is a dying occupation,” said Marilyn Sorenson, who has been working as a caregiver for 25 years. “People do not want to stay in this occupation, because they cannot make ends meet. Sometimes, we can’t even afford groceries, so we go to our clients hungry. It’s a hard profession and people get tired of low wages.”

During more than three hours of testimony, the Committee heard from home care workers representing Colorado Care Workers Unite and representatives of the Colorado Fiscal Institute, ADAPT, Colorado Cross Disability Coalition, and Colorado Long-Term Assistance Providers who all spoke in support of the bill.

Studies show that a majority of Americans will either be a caregiver or need care at some point in our lives, which is why SB 238 invests in this workforce so Coloradans can depend on a reliable, trusted, and well trained group of care providers.



From left: Home Care providers Loree Lattik, Marilyn Sorenson, Brenda Lozada and Christiano Sosa (Executive Director of The Arc of Colorado).

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