

Improve Wages & Accountability Home Care Workers

Testimony to the House Health and Insurance Committee

Andrea Kuwik, Policy Analyst

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Good afternoon, my name is Andrea Kuwik, and I am a policy analyst with the Bell Policy Center. The Bell Policy Center provides policymakers, advocates, and the public with reliable resources to create a practical policy agenda that promotes economic mobility for every Coloradan.

Heartened by the increased attention paid to our caring workforce, the Bell is here in support of SB19-238. In our work with the Strategic Action Planning Group on Aging — or SAPGA — SAPGA’s workforce committee, and Easterseals, we’ve routinely participated in conversations on the growing need to better recruit and retain a well-trained direct care workforce. Additionally, because of their importance, in both our recently published [Aging Roadmap](#) and [State Scan of Long-Term Care Best Practices](#), we examined ways to better support these direct care workers. From this work, we’ve seen both increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates and direct care worker wages — especially for home care workers who are among the lowest paid members of our direct care workforce — is an important way to boost worker satisfaction, and in turn, retention and recruitment rates.

You’ve already heard about the essential role home care workers play in bettering the lives of older adults, people with disabilities, and their families. Yet, more than just benefiting the individuals they serve, home care work has a positive ripple effect on surrounding health systems. Home based care is significantly [less expensive](#) than the facility care many would need without the help of these workers. Because a large percentage of long-term care is funded through Medicaid, when recipients receive care in less costly settings, state expenditures are reduced. To this point, a recent study by the Colorado Health Institute shows our state will have a [\\$488 million](#) yearly gap between the revenue and expenses needed to care for Colorado’s older adults by 2030 if our care systems remain unchanged. However, the same research finds this gap will be eliminated if 20 percent of individuals projected to receive nursing home care are served in their own homes instead. Increasing home care worker pay and support will be an important component in building the needed workforce capable of facilitating this shift.

The Bell appreciates that SB19-238 moves Colorado closer toward recognizing the immense value our home care workforce adds to our communities. Thank you to Representatives Duran and Kennedy for bringing this bill, and for the opportunity to testify. I’m happy to answer any questions.