



NEWS RELEASE

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People with Disabilities and Older Pennsylvanians Urge Lawmakers to Scrutinize Consumer Workforce Council

Legislative oversight is needed to learn the true cost and impact of the CWC

HARRISBURG – People with disabilities and older Pennsylvanians, who employ homecare workers to assist them with daily living, today urged the General Assembly to require legislative oversight of the proposed Consumer Workforce Council (CWC). Members of the R.E.A.L. Coalition said lawmakers need to determine the cost of creating a new state-run homecare agency and how it could adversely impact people who employ homecare attendants.

“We need to know exactly how much this new bureaucracy will cost. The more money spent to create a state-run agency, the less money there is for people who actually need the services,” said Keith Williams, a community organizer for the Northeast PA Center for Independent Living, who has employed attendants since 1988.

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Williams is scheduled to testify on April 28 before a joint hearing of the Senate committees on Aging & Youth and Labor & Industry in Harrisburg. Hundreds of people with disabilities and older Pennsylvanians are expected to come to the State Capitol to protest the CWC and raise their concerns with state lawmakers.

Also scheduled to testify in opposition to the Consumer Workforce Council is Judy Szeles, 62, of Harrisburg. Szeles has battled MS for 20 years and employs six part-time attendants. She and her family place classified ads to find attendants, two of whom have worked for Szeles for nearly seven years.

“This process works, like it does for so many people, so why is the state proposing to fix what is NOT broken?” said Szeles. “Why add a government intrusion, such as the Council, into my personal, family decision?”

Supporters of the CWC, including the Rendell Administration, have pushed for “inter-government agreements” (IGAs) with targeted counties, bypassing the General Assembly to create a CWC program. The IGA process does not require the same scrutiny as the legislative process, which requires a fiscal note to determine potential costs of a new state-run agency.

Recently, state Rep. Mauree A. Gingrich, R-Lebanon, introduced a bill that would require legislative review for IGAs between municipal governments and the Commonwealth. The bill would require that all IGAs be reviewed first by the Local Government Committee and then submitted to the Appropriations Committees of the state Senate and House of Representatives for a fiscal note and, if necessary, a public hearing.

“Currently, an Intergovernmental Agreement between several counties and the Commonwealth requires no legislation action or review,” Gingrich said. “It literally sidesteps the legislative process all together.”

Jesse Charles of Lancaster, who has used a wheelchair since he was 20 years old, said the CWC initiative would likely limit the choices of consumers regarding who assists them with their homecare. It also would subject all workers to state-mandated regulations.

“We need our state lawmakers to take a close look at the CWC and find out how it will impact our ability to hire the homecare workers we want and need to live in our homes,” said Charles, who employs five part-time homecare workers to help him.

Charles said many people with disabilities and older consumers hire relatives, neighbors or friends as caregivers. Many attendants often have full-time or part-time jobs outside of homecare. Charles said he fears his homecare workers would prefer to find another job rather than submit to the onerous requirements of joining a statewide agency.

Williams said people with disabilities in 1980s worked hard to create a system that gives them the freedom to hire and manage their homecare workers. He said many consumers are opposed to having the CWC come between them and their workers.

Gingrich echoed those comments: “Pennsylvania is proud of our pure consumer-driven model of care. Consumers of home healthcare are empowered to choose their own attendant care, determine the rate of pay and any increases. Consumers do not need more red tape.”

Coalition members support better wages and health care benefits for homecare workers. They said the problems can be addressed through cost of living adjustments (COLAs) and improving access to the state’s AdultBasic Program for health insurance.

Coalition for R.E.A.L. (Respected, Empowered, Accessible, Loyal) Home and Community-Based Services in Pennsylvania represents homecare providers, Centers for Independent Living and other senior and disability advocacy organizations. For more information, go to www.realinhomecarepa.com

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