

Testimony in Support of LD 958 Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Conduct a Review of Rules Governing In-home Personal Care Assistance Services

Good day, Senator Claxton, Representative Myers and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Betsy Sawyer-Manter; I am the CEO of SeniorsPlus, one of the five Area Agencies on Aging in the state serving Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford counties, and also the statewide provider of care coordination for those seeking to remain in their homes. The goal of SeniorsPlus is to assist older and disabled people to age well so that they are able to stay at home, independently, as long as possible.

In the provision of care coordination, SeniorsPlus assists over 4200 people in the state of Maine to remain at home and out of institutional care. The backbone of these programs is the in-home personal assistance workforce. These incredible workers support older and disabled Mainers by providing assistance with activities such as bathing, transporting, dressing, toileting and other intimate personal care needs.

The people who choose this profession are committed to the clients they serve, becoming like members of the family who come and go, often on a daily basis. It is a low paying, manual job that requires patience, caring and training. Without any doubt, the bulk of home care agencies run very professional and well managed businesses, both for profit and nonprofit. They use screening tools, background checks, provide staff training and conduct regular supervisory visits.

While most of the time the work is done in a very professional and caring manner, there are holes in the system. We do not have enough workers and in our work we have thousands of hours of personal care that go unstaffed each week, leaving some of the most vulnerable residents in Maine without the care they need. Workers are put into homes, often without a great deal of training, and are expected to know how to manage chronic conditions, Alzheimer's and other dementias, behavioral health issues, etc. The supervision of staff is sporadic and tends to be more upfront and less ongoing as good staff development would require. Much has to do with the reimbursement rates in the system of care.

We, as the care coordination agency, monitor the clients but that is mostly telephonic. As needed, we report concerns to the home care agency, the Department of Health and Human Services, Adult Protective Services, and Office of Program Integrity.

The system of care is extremely fragile. We do not have an adequate workforce nor do we recognize the workers by providing livable wages, benefits and staff development. A systematic review may present some opportunity for improvement.

In our view the top three issues are:

1. Dissatisfaction with provider/poor customer service
2. Billing issues/suspected fraud
3. Boundary issues

At SeniorsPlus we deal with two systems- Home Based Care (HBC) which is a state funded contract and MaineCare.

Home Based Care is a contract that SeniorsPlus holds that requires us to do soup to nuts. We contract with providers, manage the care and pay the providers. We believe that these providers go through a much more extensive application process than MaineCare providers. The enrollment/contracting process is very different as we focus on and collect information about basic business set up and practices, ensuring the provider has developed forms for recordkeeping, reporting, proper insurance coverage, etc. We also provide guidance on program regulations.

My understanding of the MaineCare enrollment process, is that the focus is more on gathering the information needed to set up the provider for billing purposes. From what providers share with us, they receive little, if any, guidance on the regulations and little, if any, help with required documentation, forms, etc.

The new system of Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) should help strengthen oversight to some degree.

Some suggestions for Rule Changes are:

1. Training on program rules with competency testing to confirm understanding
2. Requirement to obtain business counseling – many people start agencies without any business planning or knowledge
3. Supervisors, at a minimum, should be certified as Personal Support Specialists
4. A Mentoring program for new Personal Support staff would provide support to new hires
5. Requirement of a higher fee for PCA registration (it's currently only \$25)
6. Requirements of reporting on outcomes, complaint tracking and follow up

As I said earlier, most agencies do a very good job, however, there does need to be greater oversight of this critically important work. Thank you.

Betsy Sawyer-Manter
SeniorsPlus

Testimony in Support of LD 958 Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Conduct a Review of Rules Governing In-home Personal Care Assistance Services

Good day, Senator Claxton, Representative Myers and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Betsy Sawyer-Manter; I am the CEO of SeniorsPlus, one of the five Area Agencies on Aging in the state serving Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford counties, and also the statewide provider of care coordination for those seeking to remain in their homes. The goal of SeniorsPlus is to assist older and disabled people to age well so that they are able to stay at home, independently, as long as possible.

In the provision of care coordination, SeniorsPlus assists over 4200 people in the state of Maine to remain at home and out of institutional care. The backbone of these programs is the in-home personal assistance workforce. These incredible workers support older and disabled Mainers by providing assistance with activities such as bathing, transporting, dressing, toileting and other intimate personal care needs.

The people who choose this profession are committed to the clients they serve, becoming like members of the family who come and go, often on a daily basis. It is a low paying, manual job that requires patience, caring and training. Without any doubt, the bulk of home care agencies run very professional and well managed businesses, both for profit and nonprofit. They use screening tools, background checks, provide staff training and conduct regular supervisory visits.

While most of the time the work is done in a very professional and caring manner, there are holes in the system. We do not have enough workers and in our work we have thousands of hours of personal care that go unstaffed each week, leaving some of the most vulnerable residents in Maine without the care they need. Workers are put into homes, often without a great deal of training, and are expected to know how to manage chronic conditions, Alzheimer's and other dementias, behavioral health issues, etc. The supervision of staff is sporadic and tends to be more upfront and less ongoing as good staff development would require. Much has to do with the reimbursement rates in the system of care.

We, as the care coordination agency, monitor the clients but that is mostly telephonic. As needed, we report concerns to the home care agency, the Department of Health and Human Services, Adult Protective Services, and Office of Program Integrity.

The system of care is extremely fragile. We do not have an adequate workforce nor do we recognize the workers by providing livable wages, benefits and staff development. A systematic review may present some opportunity for improvement.

In our view the top three issues are:

1. Dissatisfaction with provider/poor customer service
2. Billing issues/suspected fraud
3. Boundary issues

At SeniorsPlus we deal with two systems- Home Based Care (HBC) which is a state funded contract and MaineCare.

Home Based Care is a contract that SeniorsPlus holds that requires us to do soup to nuts. We contract with providers, manage the care and pay the providers. We believe that these providers go through a much more extensive application process than MaineCare providers. The enrollment/contracting process is very different as we focus on and collect information about basic business set up and practices, ensuring the provider has developed forms for recordkeeping, reporting, proper insurance coverage, etc. We also provide guidance on program regulations.

My understanding of the MaineCare enrollment process, is that the focus is more on gathering the information needed to set up the provider for billing purposes. From what providers share with us, they receive little, if any, guidance on the regulations and little, if any, help with required documentation, forms, etc.

The new system of Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) should help strengthen oversight to some degree.

Some suggestions for Rule Changes are:

1. Training on program rules with competency testing to confirm understanding
2. Requirement to obtain business counseling – many people start agencies without any business planning or knowledge
3. Supervisors, at a minimum, should be certified as Personal Support Specialists

4. A Mentoring program for new Personal Support staff would provide support to new hires
5. Requirement of a higher fee for PCA registration (it's currently only \$25)
6. Requirements of reporting on outcomes, complaint tracking and follow up

As I said earlier, most agencies do a very good job, however, there does need to be greater oversight of this critically important work. Thank you.