

DIST. BY REP. JOSEPHSON
Amendment #55

From: William Browner [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 22, 2023 7:56 PM
To: House Finance
Subject: House finance committee

I have worked with people with intellectual disabilities for decades and am very concerned about the stability of the community providers. It is very important to me that Alaskans with disabilities have an adequate work force to support them. I support bridge funding to support the community-based system through another year. We cannot afford to fail individuals who are dependent upon state and federal support. Please help make funding a reality.

Sincerely,

Dr. William S. Browner

Alaskans share a Vision of a flexible system in which each person directs their own supports, based on their strengths and abilities, toward a meaningful life in their home, their job and their community. Our Vision includes supported families, professional staff and services available throughout the state now and into the future.

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Helping Alaskans with Differing Abilities Experience Hope since 1968.

[REDACTED]

From: Sampaguita Calhoun [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 22, 2023 2:22 PM
To: House Finance
Subject: Amendment proposition to support waiver services

Subject: Amendment proposition to support waiver services

Hello Alaska House Finance Committee Members,

My name is Sampaguita Calhoun and my representatives are Elvi Grey and Andy Josephson. I am writing in support of increasing the operating budget to support disability waiver services. My little brother experiences Down's Syndrome and over the years I have seen the huge benefit that his waiver services has made in his life.

By supporting him in employment, to helping learn how to manage his duties at home adding with being supported in both amazing and practical life goals, from being a remarkable athlete, artist and community member, we have given his life substance, purpose and joy as he has given those who encounter him just as much of the same!

As someone who has worked in the direct support field, and who now supervises direct service professionals, I know the work is purposeful and absolutely necessary but with the cost of living and inflation, the current wages that organizations are able to pay are very often, just not enough.

Please consider increasing the operating budget for these services. It will have huge positive impact for the entire community and even the world!

Thank you so much,

Sampaguita Calhoun
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: Donna Piper [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 23, 2023 3:44 PM
To: House Finance
Subject: Waiver Funding

Good afternoon Alaska House a finance Committee.

My name is Donna Piper and my representatives are Bill Weilechowski and Stanley Wright.

I am writing today to ask you to increase the money in your operating budget for waiver and disability services.

I have an 18-year-old daughter that has delayed development and is on the autism spectrum. In the past I have seen benefits in her ability to be in public, to self regulate and feel more comfortable around strangers by having a support person in her life.

However, since 2020 she has not had a continual support person. The reason being they do not have enough support staff. This has had a negative affect not only on my daughter, but also on our family and I am sure I am not the only one that this has happened to. Please increase the operating budget so not just my daughter and our family but other people and families can get the support that they need.

Thank you

Hello,

My name is Sonia Clary. I live in Kodiak and Representative Stutes and Senator Stevens represent me. I work agency that supports people with intellectual disabilities. I am very concerned about the stability of the community providers. It is very important to me that Alaskans with disabilities have adequate work force to support them. This will only be accomplished if the rates of reimbursement to providers providing critical services are sufficient to attract and retain workforce. In addition to what the Governor has in his budget, I fully support additional funds being added to the budget to provide funds to accomplish this task. If the network of community providers fails, the options for people with disabilities is far more restrictive and expensive impacting not only the person but the state budget as well.

Thank you for prioritizing these critical services. Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

Sonia Clary

Sonia Clary
Regional Administrative Assistant



What lies behind us and what lies before are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.

The *mission* of Hope Community Resources is to provide services and supports, requested and designed by individuals and families who experience disabilities, resulting in choice, control, family preservation and community inclusion.

Alaskans share a Vision of a flexible system in which each person directs their own supports, based on their strengths and abilities, toward a meaningful life in their home, their job and their community. Our Vision includes supported families, professional staff and services available throughout the state now and into the future.

[REDACTED]

From: Michael Bailey [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 20, 2023 4:12 PM
To: House Finance
Subject: Public Testimony (written) for Wednesday, March 22, 2023 re Operating Budget

I live in Senate District E, and House District 09-115 represented by Senator Cathy Giessel and Representative Laddie Shaw.

For over 20 years, I have worked with people with intellectual disabilities and I am deeply concerned about the stability of home and community based service providers. It is very important to me that Alaskans with disabilities have adequate work force to support them, which has been even harder to keep during pandemic times. Only if the rates of reimbursement to providers providing critical services are sufficient to attract and retain workforce will these services remain available in the near future.

By regulation 7 AAC 145.520 - Home and community-based waiver services provider rates should have been re-established at least every four years (2014, 2018, 2022 and so on) using provider cost data and to allow for cost of living increases for the direct service work force. The Governor's proposed budget \$3.700 UGF plus amended budget \$1.650 UGF, is based on the cost survey data collected by the Department for SFY2020. The annual inflation reported by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics since then was 7.04% for 2021 and 6.45% for 2022. At best, the Governor's budget would fund a 3% rate increase in SFY24.

Home and community-based service providers are struggling to sustain operations as the pandemic-related federal relief funds cease. I fully support additional funds being added to the budget to provide the funds necessary to allow a 13.5% rate increase to address the current inflation costs. I also fully support a lower permanent fund dividend this year to make this funding available for these services.

If the network of community providers fails, the options for Alaskans with disabilities is far more restrictive for them, and 3-4 times expensive for the state budget in the next few years. Bridge funding is needed urgently to prevent system collapse during the process of addressing flaws in the rate methodology system and redesigning the system as described in the Department of Health Waitlist Elimination Plan.

Sincerely,

Michael Bailey
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: Cliff Monk [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 23, 2023 4:18 PM
To: House Finance
Subject: Waiver Direct Service provider

Elvi Gray-Jackson, D, AK-G (Senate)
Andy Josephson D, AK-13 (House)

My name is Cliff Livingston

I work as a full time direct support professional and have for 27 years.

I support adults who experience intellectual disabilities to learn skills of everyday living in the community.

I have found that many people who don't do this work or who do not have a family member with a disability do not know what I do to help others. I work to support people who, without my help, would be residing in a nursing facility or in an institution due their needs created by their disability.

In the course of any regular day I am needed to provide the following kinds of help:

delegated nursing tasks, concierge, food and nutrition counselor, educator, body guard, chauffeur, cook, laundry services, personal care aide, first responder, mental health counselor, speech/language assistant, personal advocate, community disability advocate, occupational therapist, personal assistant, personal shopper, housekeeper, and clinical note writer.

I must have all these skills, and know about the kinds of help my client needs. I also need to be able to work the schedule that my client needs, many times not within regular work hours of M-F 9-5.

Yet I am paid the same and in some cases less than a fast food worker or entry level retail clerk like Target. Unlike the workers at fast food and retail, I work on my own without the presence of a direct supervisor on site. So I must also be independent and able to make good decisions on my own.

The aging and disabled population in Alaska is growing. There are less workers than can do the care. I am asking for you to help by advocating for higher pay for people doing this important work which is considered "unskilled" but in reality is a very high level of skill and responsibility. Home and community care like what I do costs far less than a nursing home or institution. We must be paid a higher wage than fast food. We are caring for the most vulnerable Alaskans of all of us.

[REDACTED]

From: Cliff Monk [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 23, 2023 3:23 PM
To: House Finance
Subject: Waiver Direct Service providers

Elvi Gray-Jackson, D, AK-G (Senate)
Andy Josephson D, AK-13 (House)

My name is Cliff Livingston

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[REDACTED]

From: Julie Shockro [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 22, 2023 11:14 AM
To: House Finance
Subject: Letter of Public Testimony

[REDACTED]
Kenai, AK 99611

March 22, 2023

Kenai Legislative Information Office
145 Main St Loop
Suite 17
Kenai, AK 99611

My Fellow Alaskans,

My name is Julie Arness. I live in District D, and my local representatives are Jesse Bjorkman and Ben Carpenter. I am writing to you today to ask for your help in prioritizing additional funding to the current budget for community based supports for people with disabilities.

I am a mother of three amazing young people, the youngest of whom was born with a rare genetic mutation that had a staggering effect on the development of his brain. Jojo (who does have a real name on his birth certificate, but goes by Jojo with everyone who knows and loves him), is a sweet, happy, and wildly innocent human that melts hearts wherever he goes. At almost six years old, Jojo is able to engage with people, but unable to walk, talk, feed, or care for himself in any way. It is difficult to comprehend the time, energy, and love required to care for what is essentially a very large infant if you are not in those shoes.

For the first several years, my husband and I spread ourselves beyond thin trying to provide everything for everyone in our family of five, but we were barely keeping our heads above water. It was especially difficult to give our older children their due time and attention, never mind our role as spouses.

When we finally accepted that we needed help, we opened our house to Hope Community Resources and eventually found Jojo's direct support professional, Autumn. You might understand the angst that comes with allowing someone else to care for your child, but that feeling is exponentially higher when you consider the added challenges of caring for a child like Jojo, who cannot advocate for, or protect himself in any way. It took time to educate Autumn in all the intricacies of our sweet boy, but today, she is able to keep him safe, provide for all his needs, and even more importantly, she loves him, and he loves her back.

Words cannot express the relief we feel, or the gratitude we have for Autumn. Because of her, Jojo gets the care he requires, and we are able to provide the kind of time and experiences for our other children that they deserve. We are able to backpack, fish, ice skate, berry pick, coach their youth basketball teams, and volunteer in their school. In short, we are able to be present and engaged parents.

What Autumn and other caregivers like her provide to families and recipients of community based supports is a priceless gift. It is a difficult and at times, exhausting job. The pool of caring, reliable, and competent adults willing to take on such a career is small enough as it is, but when wages in this state barely exceed that which what one could earn at McDonald's, it is very difficult to entice new employees, or maintain the existing ones.

As a family, we often say, "What would we do without Autumn?" We try to provide a comfortable environment for her to work in, but it would be understandable if she left us for a higher paying, less taxing position. For the moment, we're the lucky ones. There are people like us, with loved ones like Jojo, who do not have consistent care, if any. As a state, we need to provide a more competitive wage so we can retain the wonderful people like Autumn who enable our people with developmental and intellectual disabilities, and their families, to thrive. Many of these agencies who employ people like Autumn are at risk of failing due to financial instability.

I am urging you to please support an amendment for additional funding to Medicaid and community based supports for our residents with disabilities.

Thank you for your time,

Julie Arness

[REDACTED]

From: KATHLEEN FITZGERALD [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2023 7:51 PM
To: House Finance
Cc: Rep. Ben Carpenter; Sen. Jesse Bjorkman
Subject: Testimony to House Finance

My name is Kathleen Fitzgerald and I am represented by Senator Jesse Bjorkman and Representative Ben Carpenter. I am a founding member of the Key Coalition of Alaska, a member of Hope Community Resources Board of Directors and the parent/guardian of a 40 year old daughter who is supported through Alaska's IDD Medicaid Waiver Program.

I have watched the erosion of our Developmental Disabilities (DD) service system over the past several years due to inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rates. As a Board Member, I have seen the difficulty of providing services without the increases in our Medicaid reimbursement rates over the past many years. Due to the lack of adequate Medicaid rate increases, we are concerned with our ability to continue to provide services down the road. Several agencies across the state have already closed their doors and many DD agencies will be shutting down within the next couple of years if rates are not increased.

As parents we have experienced the struggle our agency has had in finding and keeping staff to care for our daughter. You can well imagine the stress and concern this creates for us as aging parents worrying about the very viability of our service system to continue to care for her after we are gone.

Many years ago, The State of Alaska closed down it's only Developmental Disability Institution due to the high cost of providing care and a desire to provide a more natural setting of support which allows for family and community involvement. If our DD agencies are forced to close, outside institutional placement will be the only option.

I support the need for additional funding to ensure the stability of our DD service system to provide ongoing services needed for my daughter and others like her. I urge you to also support this needed funding.

Respectfully,
Mark and Kathleen Fitzgerald
[REDACTED]
Soldotna, AK 99669

[REDACTED]

From: Natalya Carlson [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2023 11:17 AM
To: House Finance
Subject: Keep Support Services

Greetings Alaska Legislators,

The provider support services are vital to Alaskan families.

**Please don't take away the funding and add additional funds to assist providers.
The support services are important.**

--

Natasha Carlson, Teacher
West Valley High School
3800 Geist Road
Fairbanks, AK 99712
[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

From: Momodou Mboob [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 23, 2023 3:43 PM
To: House Finance
Subject: Support for Mental Health Associates

“Hi! My name is Momodou Mboob. I live in Barrow, Alaska. I currently work with people with intellectual disabilities (the first home supporting people with mental illness and substance abuse) and am very concerned about the stability of the community providers. It is very important to me that Alaskans with disabilities have adequate work force to support them. This will only be accomplished if the rates of reimbursement to providers providing critical services are sufficient to attract and retain workforce. In addition to what the Governor has in his budget -I fully support additional funds being added to the budget to provide funds to accomplish this task. If the network of community providers fails the options for people with disabilities is far more restrictive and expensive impacting not only the person but the state budget as well.

I support six adults with living in their home together with my wife who works as a Mental Health Associate and also The Compliance Manager for North Slope Borough Integrated Behavioral health. I work with non-profit Hope Community Resources. I have been here for almost ten years and have seen so much success with the Individuals I support. Some of them completed their high school Diploma, some maintain full time job, some work at the Heritage center performing cultural art. As you can see this accomplishment and experience, I would cherish for the rest of my life. However, the nightmare is maintaining staffing. Most of the staff I trained, end up leaving to work for companies that pays more money. Sometimes, I work for sixteen hours a day with my wife to provide support for our clients. I have cancelled almost all the vacation trips with my wife due to staffing challenges. Sometimes, I feel so guilty and would tell my wife to go while I stay with the clients I support. This had happened repetitiously on Thanksgiving, Christmas and many holiday times. Lack of staff affects the Treatment programs we have in place and I fear for myself that the rate I am working may end up detrimental to my health or affect my relationships. Thank you for prioritizing these critical services.” Thank you for listening.

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows

[REDACTED]

From: Julie Mettler [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 22, 2023 1:33 PM
To: House Finance
Subject: Finance Committee - Funding for Disability Services

3/22/23

Alaska House Finance committee members:

Hello,

My name is Julie Mettler and I live in Anchorage. I'm represented by Senator Loki Tobin and Representative Zach Fields. I've worked in the field of disability services in Anchorage for almost 27 years. These past few "pandemic years" have impacted the field of health care like nothing I've seen in my career. While hospital care and the medical professionals working in these facilities have certainly been affected negatively, the children and adults who experience life-long disabilities, who are living at home, and in their local communities, have also struggled greatly to remain safe and receive necessary services.

The lack of adequate compensation for our frontline workers – our Direct Support Professionals – has caused many in the field to seek work elsewhere during this time. We need to find a path to adequately reimburse Home and Community Based services or we will ultimately cost ourselves much more in the long run. Those costs are calculated in many ways: Institutional care is radically more expensive than home care; Families supporting their loved ones who experience disabilities are significantly at risk for breaking apart due financial and emotional stress; Caregiver's risk losing employment without adequate home care providers or flexible services; People with disabilities remain unfunded, or underfunded, resulting in lost opportunity to learn or maintain skills.

Please prioritize funding for home and community services. Alaska cannot attract or retain the workforce we need to keep people safe without additional Medicaid and state funding. We can and must do better for our loved ones and our neighbors.

Thank you,

Julie R. Mettler

[REDACTED] Anchorage AK 99501

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March 22, 2023

Dear House Finance Committee Members,

Our names are Jack and Suzanne Fisler and we live on the Kenai Peninsula. We are represented by Senator Gary Stevens and Representative Sarah Vance

We have a son with intellectual disabilities and are very concerned about the stability of the community providers whose employees deliver services to our son. It is very important to us that Alaskans with disabilities (as well as our son) have adequate work force to support them. This will only be accomplished if the rates of reimbursement to providers whose employees deliver these critical services are sufficient to recruit and keep their workforce.

In addition to what the Governor has in his budget -we fully support additional funds being added to the budget to provide funding to accomplish this task. If the network of community providers fails, the options for people with disabilities becomes far more restrictive and expensive. It will impact not only the person but the state budget as well. Thank you for providing this opportunity to comment and thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

Jack and Suzanne Fisler

[REDACTED]
Kasilof, Alaska 99610
[REDACTED]