

Monday, March 20, 2023

The Honorable Senator Cathy Giessel  
State Capitol Room 427  
Juneau AK, 99801

RE: Support for SB 106

Dear Senator Giessel,

My name is Maddy Morris, and I live in Soldotna, Alaska. I'm writing in support of SB 106. I've been a caregiver for the last nine years for my client, Nicole. She has a traumatic brain injury (TBI) due to a car accident she suffered during high school. Each morning I help Nicole get dressed. I assist her with undergarments, help brush her hair, and prepare for the day ahead. Then we go out into the world for day habilitation. She likes to go out into the community and does a different activity each day. We set goals together and sharpen her skills and methodologies to make sure she is progressing and growing and not just staying stagnant. I really care for Nicole and consider her to be family. I have been helping take care of her for the last nine years and have seen her grow. It is fulfilling work.

Before I became a caregiver I retired from my career as a tech engineer. I knew Nicole's grandmother and she asked me to help her care for her granddaughter. Ever since then I have been her caregiver. When I work with Nicole, she progresses. If I don't, she doesn't. I'm so glad that I can give her something that helps keep her life moving forward. They were going to put her in a home, and that would have been the end of her life. Being a caregiver has meant a lot to me because after her accident, Nicole only had a five percent chance of living, and because she got the in-home care she needed, she lived and is doing very well. Everything I have learned, I learned on the journey with Nicole.

The problem is, over the last few years, it's gotten harder and harder to find a good caregiver. Soldotna is a spread-out rural community. Low wages, the commitment to work every holiday with no time off, and the lack of benefits in agencies are big reasons that there is a caregiver shortage. It is scary, because if my client can't find a good caregiver, she might have to go unattended which is a dangerous situation for Nicole. (She's quite curious and likes to get into things). It's not good if she's on her own.

When there's no other caregiver to cover for me, my agency won't send any back up at all, even if I'm sick, I still have to work and risk Nicole either getting sick, or going without the care she needs. When Nicole caught Covid, I had to show up. There was no choice. I would have liked to be able to have a day off, I would have liked to have sick leave or vacation time, but I don't, even if I get burnt out.

I think making it easier for family members to become paid caregivers is important because we need all the caregivers we can get. Family members become caregivers and sometimes continue caregiving because it can be very fulfilling work. Sometimes family members must become caregivers full time and by doing that, they develop a lot of skills and on the job training in a family environment. This means a lot to me, and I appreciate you continuing to fight for us caregivers, because everyone will eventually need care. Thank you for continuing to take steps to make sure the care system gets fixed here in Alaska.

Sincerely,

Maddy Morris

