

Tuesday, March 21, 2023

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

RE: Support for SB 106

Dear Senator Giessel,

Hello, my name is Jennifer Williams and I live in Anchor Point, Alaska. I am writing in support of SB 106. I've been a caregiver for thirteen years. Currently, I care for a client who is dealing with Alzheimer's. A lot of the folks that I have taken care of over the years are Elders. They have taken care of us through the years. Being a PCA is my way of giving back. They have made many sacrifices through our lifetime, and I feel that as a family, it's our moral responsibility to assist them through sometimes difficult situations and health issues.

Over the last few years, it's harder and harder to find a good reliable caregiver for a lot of reasons. During covid, everyone started to rely on family members more often because caregivers got sick. I also think that Covid gave caregivers the chance to think and realize that we are worth more, that our families are worth more, and that we need a living wage.

When people can't find a good caregiver, the client goes without care. They don't get the proper doses of medication or groceries. If they go without care, it can be detrimental to their wellbeing. Clients can get malnourished and not get the proper care they need. Some caregivers like me who do this because we love it, feel obligated to stay longer or take on unpaid work just so clients don't go without.

We need to take care of each other. No one wants their loved ones to go without care that's essential for their health, especially the individuals who are isolated and live in rural areas. I also think that the prices of gas have a lot to do with the shortage. With me having to drive out to these rural areas, I don't get compensated for gas or wear and tear on my vehicle.

When there's no other caregiver to cover for me, I volunteer my own time to make sure my clients have their basic needs covered. Through the years I've taken care of up to six people at one time and was way over extended. Communication is key, because these clients don't have any other options, and they will just literally go without the care they need, they aren't getting the hours covered by their healthcare insurance, or there is no one else around to help them.

I think that making it easier for family members to become paid Caregivers could help with the shortage we are facing in Alaska. With Caregivers not getting the pay we need, we are going to keep experiencing a shortage of Caregivers at agencies. Families will need to take the responsibility and give up their jobs and career to stay at home for loved ones. It is crucial that they get paid to do so.

That is why I ask you to please pass this bill so we can make it easier for family members to become permanently paid caregivers. If families can get paid to take care of their loved ones, they can feel like they are productive. It would make sure that clients are getting the care they need. It could help with financial stability without families taking on all the burden of care plus other jobs. I thank you for taking steps to make this care system work better for everyone. It's urgently needed, and it makes a big difference.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Williams