

## Testimony SB 1035 April 4, 2019

Senate Committee on Human Services

Submitted by John Mullin on behalf of AARP

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*AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With 510,000 members in Oregon, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families with a focus on health security, financial stability, and personal fulfillment. An important aspect of our advocacy is protecting and enhancing long term services and supports, consistent with the values of independence, dignity, and choice.*

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On behalf of AARP, I am pleased to support SB 1035, a bill that will provide a pathway to bringing additional and critical respite resources to assist caregivers in Oregon. Simply stated, the bill would require the Department of Human Services (DHS) in conjunction with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to convene a stakeholder group to advise on the creation of a waiver application to be submitted to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) This waiver would request authority to match state General Funds with Medicaid for providing respite services and other supports for family caregivers at risk of becoming financially eligible for a full range of Medicaid services. This match, if approved, would draw down new federal resources based on future commitment of state funds.

### **Why is respite (a short break from caregiving) important?**

According to the 2016 report on *Improving Caregiver Respite Services in Oregon*<sup>1</sup>, produced by the Oregon Caregiver Respite Work Group, it is

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<sup>1</sup> [http://action.aarp.org/site/DocServer/Oregon\\_Caregiver\\_Respite\\_WG\\_Report.pdf?docID=3204](http://action.aarp.org/site/DocServer/Oregon_Caregiver_Respite_WG_Report.pdf?docID=3204)

estimated that: “43.5 million Americans have provided unpaid care to an adult or child in the last year. In Oregon, an estimated 469,000 family caregivers provide about 437 million hours of unpaid care each year with an estimated value of \$5.7 billion.” Caregiving is an issue of tremendous importance to the wellbeing of Oregonians. This legislation was drafted as a response to one of the recommendations in the aforementioned work group report on caregiver respite. The efforts of the work group were recognized by the Legislature in 2017 by unanimously passing HJR 4.<sup>2</sup>

Caregivers face their difficult tasks every day, and there is considerable risk of stress and burnout. That’s what makes respite care/time off for caregivers so crucial. In an AARP survey conducted in the Fall of 2018, 71% of current and former caregivers reported emotional stress, and 75% said that they would find respite care to be helpful to them.

All of us have experienced caregiving roles, and in many ways, providing care defines us as human beings. We would not have survived without care at birth, we give and receive care on a temporary basis and sometimes for many years, and the last person we are likely to be aware of before our end of life is a family or health care professional caregiver.

In order for caregiving to be successfully supported, respite is needed. Time off to go out and shop, go to a movie, visit friends, or just take a nap are among the opportunities this new respite program would provide.

This idea is nothing new. Minnesota and Washington have both included similar programs in their Medicaid waivers that have been approved by CMS. Besides helping families stay in their own homes longer instead of being placed in a long term care facility, a major goal of this proposal is to save money in the state Medicaid budget. Modest support for family caregivers will reduce the likelihood of their loved ones enrolling in Medicaid long term care services, which are considerably more expensive. In fact, CMS will only approve waivers that: “Promote efficiencies that ensure Medicaid’s sustainability over the long term.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2017R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HJM4/Introduced>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.medicare.gov/medicaid/section-1115-demo/about-1115/index.html>

On a personal note, I was director of Clackamas County Social Services for 22 years. We created a Caregiver/Respite Program when the Life Span Respite Program was funded by the State. We also used available Older Americans Act funding. Even though we had success, the need far outstripped the available resources. The implementation of SB 1035 has the potential to greatly expand services for those most in need.

For all of these reasons, I strongly support the passage of SB 1035 so that we may take a significant step forward in meeting the needs of caregivers and the elders and people with disabilities in their care.

Thank you for your consideration.