

February 11, 2021

Regarding: HB 2842

Chair Fahey and Members of the House Committee on Housing:

My name is Marie Gertz, I am a Personal Agent (case manager) for adults with developmental disabilities at Community Pathways, a Support Service Brokerage in the Portland area. I am writing in support of HB2842, the Healthy Homes bill. This bill will fill a vital need in creating a source of funding for critical home repairs needed to allow home modifications. Home modifications, but not home repairs are covered in the Medicaid services for projects such as ramps, accessible bathrooms and other disability-related modifications. These modifications play a critical role in allowing people to live safely in their homes. They decrease the need for paid support from others and ultimately save money as people are able to choose to continue to live on their own or with family rather than move and use more expensive supports. Unfortunately, many of our customers need home repairs before a home modification. For many, without a repair resource, the home modifications are not an option. People then have to move into more expensive services.

I had the experience of someone on my caseload who uses a wheelchair and thus used a ramp to access his home. Over the years, numerous case managers documented the need for a new wheelchair ramp on the exterior of the family home as the current ramp was rotting in several places. After three years of coordination with Developmental Disability services, contractors, and the family, work on the ramp began in late 2018. Unfortunately, when the contractor took down the porch overhang, he discovered dry rot where the porch overhang connected with the roof. According to Medicaid rules, the dry rot is considered a home repair and the responsibility of the homeowner and all work had to cease until the homeowner could repair the rot. The family was unable to afford this unexpected expense, leaving the project in limbo. During this time, the hole in the home's roof was covered by a tarp.

Rain continued to enter the home causing further damage to the door, front entry and carpet. Instead of making the client safer in his home these modifications and the lack of ability to cover unexpected repairs, created a safety issue for several weeks until repairs could occur. Eventually I was able to cobble together enough private funding to cover the needed repairs, but this was expensive, time consuming, labor intensive, and slow-moving.

The current home modification service is inaccessible to many of our clients because of our inability to cover vital repairs that may be discovered during the course of the modification. This bill is a great opportunity to both save money and, more importantly, honor our shared mission to allow people to live healthy, self-determined lives.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Marie Gertz
Personal Agent, Community Pathways