

Public Testimony on Senate Bill #1556: Caregiver Certification and Registry

February 3rd, 2022

Good afternoon, Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice Chair Robinson and Members of the Committee.

For the record, my name is Stacy Heath, I live in Eugene and I am a homecare worker.

I support Senate Bill #1556 to create a certification and public registry for caregivers.

I would like to tell you about myself. I grew up in a single parent home with nine siblings due to the sudden passing of my father. If my siblings and I didn't go to school we didn't eat. Our school lunch was our meal for the day. We went several months at a time without water and electricity. Out of embarrassment and shame so no one knew what was going on in our home at night pulling a wagon filled with bottles we'd walk a mile to the nearest park and fill the wagon and bottles with water so we could bathe, wash clothes, etc. Unbeknownst to us someone did know and one Christmas this elder woman came bearing gifts, one for each one of us. This woman's kind gesture went a long ways for a family in crisis.

I stumbled upon the caregiving path March of 2013. I witnessed on several occasions my friend ever so carefully walking her elderly mother to her car after church service. I pondered what I was seeing and thought their is a need that needs to be met. Like the elder woman who came bearing gifts because she saw a need one day I decided to help my friend with her mother. Assisting her mother to the car led me to going out to their home and offering companionship and meal preparations while my friend ran errands. As her mother declined she sought out some home health services. My friends decision to sign with the agency depended on the hiring of me. She requested that I stay on since I had been with her mom for 5 months. I was unskilled, uncertified and untrained but they hired me on August 1st, 2013. Her mom had Alzheimer's, heart disease and was a diabetic, which I had no knowledge about any of them and certainly no skills. I wasn't offered no training, no literature or assistance on how to offer the right kind of care. Being sent into homes blind folded with no training or schooling under your belt needs to stop.

I've learned a lot in my almost 9 years as a caregiver just winging it and figuring it out by googling or watching videos. I've trained caregivers myself as fill ins for when I may be absent.

A caregiver was sent one time in my absence to care for my friend's mom. The caregiver became frustrated and started crying because her mom wasn't doing what she was asking her to do so she left leaving my client without care. If she would have had training in Alzheimer's care she would have known that the disease takes away their cognitive ability to understand and memory to know what to do and how to do it. One time I was sent to a client that had PLS. I wasn't told that they had any disease before entering their home. The client told me what she had and I said what does that stand for Primary Lateral Sclerosis so I turned to google to get some helpful information on the disease and how it impacted my client's life. Too many times caregivers are sent to homes without the skill sets that are needed to meet the clients needs. Clients or their family members are left at the mercy of private agencies to send someone qualified or they are left with the daunting task of interview after interview trying to find someone on their own with the qualifications.

Our healthcare system is in a crisis. I support creating a certification for home health workers, because it will allow workers like myself to show my abilities, expertise, and accomplishments. It will help with career development, it will look good on a resume, it will professionalize home health workers and acknowledge us as a critical component to the health and safety of our communities, it will enhance the quality of service which will protect our clientele. As caregivers and those in our communities who give care and support we need to be supported. While this bill won't change existing training requirements it will shine the light on the dire need for caregiving training and it will hold private agencies, corporations, companies, etc. to the existing rules. Like that elder woman extending a kind gesture bearing gifts to a family in crisis, this committee can bear a gift to home health workers and most importantly our vulnerable population by voting in favor of creating a certification and registry for home and facility-based caregivers.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this issue.

Sincerely,

Stacy Heath