Establish Equitable Compensation for Parent/Family Caregivers

The Problem

In the state of Washington, care providers may be compensated for providing support and personal care to individuals with disabilities living in the community. Current state policy permits the parents of an individual with a disability over the age of 18 to receive compensation as a paid caregiver.

However, the parent of an individual with a disability under the age of 18 cannot be compensated for providing the same care. Current policy, therefore, establishes a threshold for caregiver compensation that is tied only to the age of the care recipient, without consideration of either the type of care, or level of care, that is needed, or any other hardship this policy creates for the caregiver and their family. It assigns differing levels of value to the care provided by parent/family caregivers. The care provided by some is deemed valuable; the same care provided by others is considered of zero value.

Failing to compensate a specific sub-group of parent/family caregivers for the care services they provide, based solely on the age of the care recipient, is inequitable and harmful to parents and families across the state. Caregiving is hard work! Informal (unpaid) caregiving — the type of care provided by parent/family caregivers — has been associated with higher risks to both physical and mental health, as well as financial hardship. It can be difficult for parent/family caregivers to balance caregiving and outside employment, which may cause caregivers to remain chronically underemployed — a consequence of caregiving that, no doubt, has a profound impact on the caregiver, other family members and the care recipient themselves. The fact that state policy allows for the parent/family caregivers of individuals over 18 to receive compensation for their caregiving work, while denying that same compensation to other parent/family caregivers leaves these families of young children financially unstable and socially vulnerable.

The problem with the current policy is all the more obvious when one considers that a significant majority of parent/family caregivers are women. Thus, it is women, as well as any other children within their care, who experience the most severe consequences of unjust caregiving policies. The inequitable impact of this policy on the mothers of young children, taken alone, should be sufficient to justify a legislative directive that DDA rights this wrong.

The Solution

The current policy permitting parent/family caregivers to be paid for performing caregiving tasks only when their child reaches the age of 18 is highly problematic and must be addressed. The legislature should establish that all parent/family caregivers providing care to their child, who is eligible for paid services, can be compensated for care tasks, regardless of the chronological age of the care recipient.

Questions or comments?
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