



The Honorable John R. Gordner
Senate Box 203027
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3027

Senator Gordner:

On April 21 I attended Bayada Nurses' legislative day in Harrisburg. Along with my Director, Ruth Ann Kephart and Director Rick Hynick of the Bloomsburg Office, we spoke with your assistant Philip Dunn. My co-workers and I are very concerned about the proposed Consumer Workforce Council and the effect that this will have on home care in Pennsylvania.

We support the goals of the proposal: quality care, consumer direction and better jobs for workers. The Consumer Workforce Council, however, is not the way to achieve these goals. We ask you to oppose such an agreement.

The Consumer Workforce Council would:

- Create a state-run homecare agency, an unnecessary level of bureaucracy and expense, at a time of significant budget shortfalls
- Significantly alter the way Pennsylvania provides home and community-based services without the legislature's approval, by using an Intergovernmental Agreement between the Departments of Public Welfare and Aging and local county governments
- Take away consumer rights
- Reduce choices for consumers
- Cost the state and counties taxpayer money
- Create unfair competition for private industry

An expansive network of over 750 homecare agencies and centers for independent living already exists in Pennsylvania caring for approximately 190,000 individuals in any given week. The proposed Council will have no impact whatsoever on giving people the opportunity to remain at home—they already have it. In the states that have a public authority like the CWC, there have been no studies which have demonstrated that a public authority increases quality care. Furthermore, experience has shown burgeoning costs and fraud and abuse. <http://www.sacbee.com/editorials/story/1754211.html>

As a taxpayer I am deeply concerned that funding would be diverted to create a new structure and system, duplicating what I do as an employee of Bayada Nurses. As a professional I work daily to recruit, screen, hire, train and equip high quality professionals to join us providing the highest quality care to our clients. Just a year ago we visited our legislators to encourage an increase in reimbursements. As soon as we received the increase it was passed on to our employees. Bayada Nurses understands that to be the premier provider of home health care in Pennsylvania we need to be the employer of choice.

Please give your serious attention to all the issues involved in the creation of the Consumer Workforce Council. Please contact me if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Veronica May
Recruiter

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Editorial: Another day, a new county crisis

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Despite sharply rising cost and evidence of rampant fraud in Sacramento County's In Home Supportive Services program, the Sacramento grand jury says the county is doing virtually nothing to prevent abuse in the program. In its latest report, "IHSS: For the Needy, Not the Greedy," the grand jury draws attention to yet another important, but badly managed, county program.

Depending on a client's needs, IHSS workers help to bathe, dispense medications, cook, clean or provide other domestic services that make it possible for poor blind, elderly and disabled people to stay in their homes. The program is funded by a combination of federal, state and local money. When working as intended, IHSS helps the frail and elderly stay out of more expensive and, for most, less desirable nursing homes.

As valuable as the program is, its rising cost is alarming. Sacramento County is spending \$24 million to administer the program in the current fiscal year, more than double what it spent just five years ago.

"Almost every person interviewed," the grand jury's cover letter says, "spoke of rampant abuses. At best it is a dysfunctional system, plagued by upper management that refuses to make meaningful changes ..."

The program's design makes it an easy target for fraud. After all, the recipients of IHSS services are blind, disabled, frail and elderly - in short, not likely to be of much help in fighting fraud. To make matters worse, there are no qualifications for the workers they hire to help them stay in their homes, no assessment of their ability to provide care, no criminal background checks, no tuberculosis tests and no training for most of them. In addition, most of the workers are family members or acquaintances of the disabled clients they serve.

Given all that, the temptation and the opportunity for fraud are significant. As the report makes clear, fraud can be carried out in a variety of ways. Recipients exaggerate their disabilities. Workers lie about the number of hours they work. Sometimes recipients and providers collude, dividing government paychecks.

Sometimes, payments continue when the provider is incarcerated or the recipient is in a nursing home.

To be fair, Sacramento County isn't alone in dealing with rising cost and fraud within IHSS.

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Statewide, IHSS costs per recipient have jumped to an average of \$13,000 per year, or 100 percent higher than 10 years ago. The statewide IHSS fraud rate is a staggering 25 percent.

The grand jury identified some fixes that ought to be easy. For example, the county is supposed to reassess clients' needs annually, but reassessments are four to 12 months behind schedule.

That's inexcusable.

Prompted by county supervisors who expressed alarm at rising costs, county budget officials say they've been conducting their own internal IHSS review since June. That's eight months ago, surely enough time to put needed reforms in place.

Sacramento County has a \$168 million deficit. Its Child Protective Services agency is in turmoil. This report alleges rampant fraud within IHSS. Taken together, these circumstances suggest a county management in over its head. What are county supervisors going to do about it?

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