

Cathy McMorris Rodgers

Opening Statement

Health Hearing 10/25/23

As Prepared for Delivery

IMPORTANCE OF CARE FOR DISABILITY COMMUNITY

I'd like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

As many know, my son Cole was born with that special extra twenty-first chromosome, most of you know it as Down syndrome.

Today, Cole is a sixteen-year-old high-school student with big dreams.

He wants to be a football player, a pastor, and a race car driver, and he's also looking at college.

For people with disabilities like Cole, others born with intellectual and developmental disabilities, or even seniors facing physical limitations in their everyday lives, the sky is truly the limit to their potential.

Long-term care services and supports, whether that be those provided as home and community-based services—or HCBS for short—or in nursing home settings, are key to ensuring that people can live successful and independent lives.

As many of us know, there is a shortage of long-term care providers.

WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

Since 2020, we've lost tens of thousands of workers across both HCBS and nursing home settings, as workers left the field due to burnout or in pursuit of other career opportunities.

While these stressors were present in the long-term care field prior to the pandemic, they've gotten worse, even as other parts of the health care field begin to return to pre-pandemic employment levels.

The future of care for seniors and people with disabilities depends on us finding ways to support long-term care workers.

ADMINISTRATIVE RULES THAT LIMIT CARE

I've been troubled by recent proposals from the Biden administration that, while likely well-intentioned, would further undermine this workforce.

The administration proposed the so-called "Medicaid Access Rule", which would require home health agencies to pass through a minimum of 80 percent of all reimbursements directly to the direct care workforce.

State Medicaid Directors and advocates, however, have raised concerns, stating that such a high threshold is out of reach for most agencies and would require agencies to have to reduce service and staff to be able to ensure that they could comply with the rule.

Put simply, this proposal would actively undermine access to care, running counter to the very name of the rule.

Additionally, just last month, the administration followed the Access Rule with a proposal to require minimum staffing levels for nursing homes.

Like the Access Rule, this Minimum Staffing Rule would set an unrealistic staffing thresholds.

Independent analyses have found that as many as 80 percent of all nursing homes would be unable to meet the requirements of the rule, meaning facilities would have to increase costs for residents, reduce censuses and stop accepting new residents, or potentially even close.

We all believe in access to high quality care.

But proposed requirements that are untenable for 4 out of every 5 nursing homes do not represent a serious solution.

And those who rely on skilled nursing care deserve better than a proposal that could dramatically curtail their care.

These top-down approaches are not the way forward in supporting seniors and people with disabilities, and it's my hope that today we will begin a conversation on ways to find more meaningful solutions to help those in need.

We cannot let this rule simply go into effect and watch idly as individuals with disabilities and seniors lose the support they need to maintain their independence. We do not want to see people forced into hospitals for chronic conditions that could have been avoided.

NEED FOR BIPARTISAN SOLUTIONS

I'm proud of the bipartisan work this committee has done.

From passing the Lower Costs, More Transparency Act to make health care more affordable and more accessible, to reauthorizing Mr. Guthrie's SUPPORT Act to help those struggling with substance use disorder.

And I'll note that my colleague, Mr. Pence, just led a bipartisan letter to the administration with over 90 members raising concerns with the nursing home staffing rule.

I hope in the spirit of bipartisanship, we can discuss these policies and find a pathway forward that helps people with disabilities and seniors get access to their care they need.