

April 21, 2009

Dear Governor Ritter,

It has been a privilege to serve on the Colorado SILC as someone who you entrusted with the responsibility of representing individuals with disabilities. As you are aware, the mission of the advisory committee is to advocate on behalf of individuals interested in independent living.

I would like to respectfully remind you of the United States' Supreme Court decision in the 1999 Olmstead case which mandates that States cannot keep people in nursing homes because of lack of community services funding. The members of the Colorado SILC are concerned that the Medicaid cuts to areas including personal care, community based medical care and durable medical equipment will result in preventing individuals with disabilities from being able to live independently in the community. I am sure you would agree that forcing young people in their 20's, 30's and 40's or any age to live in a nursing home just to receive services would be a travesty. Members of the Colorado SILC identified Medicaid funding and the resulting impact to willing providers as a priority issue at our general meeting held on March 20, 2009. In fact, we are currently collecting additional data to better advise your office of the negative impact that such policies have on members of our community, which we hope to present as an issue brief.

Last week though, it became clear that some members of the Colorado House of Representatives fail to understand the legal and moral responsibility which the State of Colorado has for people with disabilities. As of Friday April 17, 2009 an amendment had been added to the Long Bill which effectively cuts the reimbursement rates paid to providers who accept Medicaid patients.

It is already difficult to find providers willing to service this vulnerable population. Many would be providers have been forced to either limit the number of patients they have been willing to see or to stop seeing Medicaid patients all together. This is due in large part to the last round of budget cuts. Additional cuts would undoubtedly make an already difficult situation even worse. For many people living with a disability, home health care is one of the few services which provides

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the freedom of living in the community, rather than being relegated to spending the rest of their natural lives stuck in a nursing home. Not only would additional cuts to Medicaid seriously impact people in the disability community but it could also severely alter the State's budget by forcing in people into to a more costly full time Nursing Home situation.

In addition, the numbers of Durable Medical Equipment Providers who are willing to provide services have already been cut by over 50% during the last round. Further cuts will only shrink the already diminished list of providers.

As you know, Durable Medical Equipment suppliers are a lifeline for many members of the disability community living at home. They provide fitted mobility devices and supplies such as oxygen and catheter supplies. One size does not fit all and it takes experience and education to keep people functioning with their equipment safely in their homes. To cut a vendor system that has already taken a 9% reduction, is to force more people to go to the hospital with secondary health conditions, increase the emergency room wait time as people are forced to use ERs as their primary health care providers, and greatly increase insurance premiums as costs are shifted to individuals with insurance. Additional cuts may so seriously jeopardize the health and safety of people with disabilities that they would have no choice but to go into a nursing home.

Please, do not hesitate to call me if I can provide additional information as you give careful consideration to how additional budget cut will impact one of Colorado's most vulnerable populations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Debra Peterson".