

Second Regular Session
Seventy-fourth General Assembly
STATE OF COLORADO

INTRODUCED

LLS NO. R24-0931.02 Jessica Wigent x3701

HJR24-1022

HOUSE SPONSORSHIP

Young and Duran,

SENATE SPONSORSHIP

Danielson and Exum,

House Committees

Senate Committees

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 24-1022

101 CONCERNING RECOGNIZING THE FIRST FULL WEEK OF APRIL 2024 AS
102 "DIRECT CARE WORKER APPRECIATION WEEK", AND, IN
103 CONNECTION THEREWITH, RECOGNIZING THE FIRST FULL WEEK
104 OF EVERY APRIL THEREAFTER AS "DIRECT CARE WORKER
105 APPRECIATION WEEK".

1 WHEREAS, More than 70,000 older Coloradans and Coloradans
2 with disabilities currently receive long-term care services and supports in
3 group homes, assisted living residences, and nursing homes and in the
4 comfort of their own homes; this care is often provided by direct care
5 workers; and

6 WHEREAS, Direct care workers are professional nursing aides,
7 home health aides, personal care aides, and companions who provide a

*Shading denotes HOUSE amendment. Double underlining denotes SENATE amendment.
Capital letters or bold & italic numbers indicate new material to be added to existing law.
Dashes through the words or numbers indicate deletions from existing law.*

1 wide range of services to their clients who are aging and disabled, and
2 who may have complex medical needs, by assisting with vital daily tasks
3 such as:

- 4 ● Helping clients dress and bathe, prepare meals, and
5 perform exercises to keep up their mobility;
- 6 ● Ensuring their clients' well-being and safety;
- 7 ● Accompanying clients to school and work and religious
8 and recreational activities; and
- 9 ● Monitoring a client's conditions and behaviors, which
10 provides critical information for other health-care workers
11 who serve the client; and

12 WHEREAS, The need to recognize, retain, and recruit direct care
13 workers is critical; in just 10 years, 18% of Coloradans will be 65 years
14 of age or older, and while many report they would prefer to age in place
15 in their homes, 20% of older adults have a physical difficulty and 12.5%
16 report challenges to living independently; many of these Coloradans will
17 depend on the professional care of direct care workers; and

18 WHEREAS, There is currently a worrisome shortage of these
19 workers in the field, in Colorado and the nation; our state is predicted to
20 become the third-fastest aging state in the country, with 1.2 million older
21 adults by 2030; but researchers anticipate there will only be 84,000 direct
22 care workers in the field in 2028; this care gap will strain the health-care
23 system, as hospitals will have to delay discharging clients, which can lead
24 to dangerous consequences, like reducing the mobility of clients and
25 exposing them to infection; and

26 WHEREAS, The professional care provided by direct care workers
27 fills many needs; in Colorado, one in three older adults lives alone; these
28 seniors can experience chronic loneliness and feelings of isolation, which
29 may exacerbate existing health conditions and can lead to depression,
30 cognitive decline, and even a weakened immune system; direct care
31 workers are an integral part of the solution to alleviate loneliness, as they
32 often provide companionship, which is an essential part of a healthy and
33 fulfilling life; and

34 WHEREAS, The state of Colorado greatly benefits from the
35 personal commitments made by direct care workers; this was especially
36 on display during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, as direct care
37 workers stepped up and provided care while facing personal risks on the
38 front line; these workers saved lives and sustained communities; and

1 WHEREAS, Direct care workers must build trusting relationships
2 with their clients; studies often find that the number one reason people
3 become direct care workers is their commitment to the clients they serve;
4 while the work can be deeply gratifying, there is more we can do to
5 support these professionals; and

6 WHEREAS, Despite the incredibly important job they do, with its
7 unique social, emotional, and physical demands, Colorado's direct care
8 workers face low wages and limited benefits; and

9 WHEREAS, Most of Colorado's direct care workers are women,
10 and 44% of direct care workers identify as nonwhite; despite the increase
11 in the base wage in 2022, 37% of direct care workers in Colorado earn at
12 or below 200% of the federal poverty level, which is \$55,000 annually for
13 a family of four; and

14 WHEREAS, Direct care workers struggle to afford rent and to pay
15 for child care and for maintenance on their vehicles, which is critical, as
16 the position often requires them to travel from home to home, working
17 long hours and driving many miles to visit clients in rural areas, which are
18 often care deserts; in addition, direct care workers have some of the
19 highest occupational injury rates in the country, and they face ergonomic
20 hazards and risk injury when lifting clients and interacting with protective
21 pets; all of this leads to burnout and makes it harder to recruit and retain
22 the number of workers needed to meet the number of Coloradans who
23 need care; and

24 WHEREAS, More can be done to reduce the financial hardships
25 and increase the financial security and safety of direct care workers;
26 research indicates that when direct care workers are paid more, when they
27 feel sufficiently supported and valued, they stay in their positions longer;
28 many direct care workers lack access to a career pathway or advanced
29 training opportunities; by offering more training, so that workers can
30 expand their competencies and expertise in the field, fewer workers will
31 be injured, turnover will decline, and job satisfaction and retention will
32 increase; and

33 WHEREAS, The level of support for direct care workers, from
34 wages to training to career advancement, must be commensurate with the
35 highly demanding and crucial nature of their work; and

36 WHEREAS, Colorado recognizes the importance in investing in

1 direct care workers; in 2022, the state established a base wage of \$15 per
2 hour for direct care workers who work with individuals on Medicaid,
3 which was recently raised to \$15.75 per hour; and

4 WHEREAS, In rural and western Colorado, direct care workers
5 are joining apprenticeship programs funded by federal grants that provide
6 education and on-the-job training in areas such as dementia care,
7 behavioral health, and medication management; and

8 WHEREAS, Another important way Colorado is working to
9 support direct care workers is through the Direct Care Workforce
10 Collaborative, a Colorado stakeholder-led initiative supported by the
11 department of health care policy and financing to reinforce the
12 importance of the direct care workforce in three areas:

- 13 ● To grow awareness of the value and essential contribution
14 of the direct care workforce across the health-care
15 continuum;
- 16 ● To support increased training and professional career
17 advancement opportunities for direct care workers; and
- 18 ● To support increased compensation and benefits for direct
19 care workers; and

20 WHEREAS, Additionally, in 2023, with the passage of Senate Bill
21 23-261, the General Assembly created the Direct Care Workforce
22 Stabilization Board (Board) in the department of labor and employment;
23 the Board is tasked with developing recommendations on:

- 24 ● Standards for compensation, working hours, and working
25 conditions;
- 26 ● How the state can better communicate information to direct
27 care workers about their rights;
- 28 ● Combating the challenges faced by direct care employers;
29 and
- 30 ● Investigating the impacts of racial and economic injustices
31 on direct care workers and the clients to whom they
32 provide services; and

33 WHEREAS, Leaders in the public and private sectors must
34 continue to create policies that promote affordable, high-quality,
35 professional care for older Coloradans and Coloradans with disabilities
36 while also ensuring fair wages for the workers who care for them; and

37 WHEREAS, Direct care workers do so much for their clients; they

1 provide company during extraordinarily challenging times, like during the
2 COVID-19 pandemic; they enhance the lives of their clients and support
3 their personal health and independence; and they care for many until their
4 very last breath, when even then their work continues, as they provide
5 comfort and solace to their clients' families; now, therefore,

6 *Be It Resolved by the House of Representatives of the*
7 *Seventy-fourth General Assembly of the State of Colorado, the Senate*
8 *concurring herein:*

9 That we, the members of the Colorado General Assembly,
10 proclaim the first full week of April 2024 and the first full week of April
11 each year thereafter as "Direct Care Worker Appreciation Week", with
12 the goals of:

13 1. Appreciating the work of direct care workers in Colorado; and

14 2. Recognizing these workers' commitment, compassion,
15 competency, and dedication as an important asset to the state of Colorado.

16 *Be It Further Resolved,* That a copy of this Joint Resolution be
17 sent to the Direct Care Workforce Collaborative.