



HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 24-1022

BY REPRESENTATIVE(S) Young and Duran, Amabile, Bacon, Bird, Boesenecker, Bradley, Brown, Catlin, Clifford, Daugherty, deGruy Kennedy, Epps, Froelich, Garcia, Hamrick, Hartsook, Hernandez, Herod, Jodeh, Joseph, Kipp, Lieder, Lindsay, Lindstedt, Lukens, Lynch, Mabrey, Marshall, Martinez, Marvin, Mauro, McCormick, McLachlan, Ortiz, Pugliese, Ricks, Rutinel, Sirota, Snyder, Soper, Story, Taggart, Titone, Valdez, Velasco, Vigil, Weinberg, Weissman, Winter T., Woodrow, McCluskie;
also SENATOR(S) Danielson and Exum, Bridges, Buckner, Coleman, Fields, Gardner, Ginal, Gonzales, Hansen, Hinrichsen, Jaquez Lewis, Kirkmeyer, Kolker, Liston, Lundeen, Marchman, Michaelson Jenet, Mullica, Pelton B., Priola, Rich, Roberts, Rodriguez, Simpson, Smallwood, Sullivan, Van Winkle, Will, Winter F., Zenzinger, Fenberg.

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

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

WHEREAS, Direct care workers are professional nursing aides, home health aides, personal care aides, and companions who provide a wide range of services to their clients who are aging and disabled, and who may have complex medical needs, by assisting with vital daily tasks such as:

- Helping clients dress and bathe, prepare meals, and perform exercises to keep up their mobility;

- Ensuring their clients' well-being and safety;
- Accompanying clients to school and work and religious and recreational activities; and
- Monitoring a client's conditions and behaviors, which provides critical information for other health-care workers who serve the client; and

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, Direct care workers must build trusting relationships with their clients; studies often find that the number one reason people

become direct care workers is their commitment to the clients they serve; while the work can be deeply gratifying, there is more we can do to support these professionals; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- To grow awareness of the value and essential contribution of the direct care workforce across the health-care continuum;
- To support increased training and professional career advancement opportunities for direct care workers; and
- To support increased compensation and benefits for direct care workers; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. Appreciating the work of direct care workers in Colorado; and
2. Recognizing these workers' commitment, compassion, competency, and dedication as an important asset to the state of Colorado.

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

Julie McCluskie
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES

Steve Fenberg
PRESIDENT OF
THE SENATE

Robin Jones
CHIEF CLERK OF THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES

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