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NEWS RELEASE

Nearly 300 Advocates Tell Lawmakers: Support Seniors & People with Disabilities, Make Homecare Accessible

Harrisburg, Pa. (April 9, 2019) Nearly 300 providers of home-based care for seniors and those with disabilities visited the state Capitol today with the Pennsylvania Homecare Association (PHA) to urge lawmakers and members of Governor Wolf's administration to support home and community-based care.

The advocates donned canes symbolizing the support provided by homecare agencies that enable people to live in their own homes and communities. Vicki Hoak, PHA CEO said "We're carrying canes to show legislators that seniors and people with disabilities are leaning on them to do the right thing and support three things to make home-based care more accessible."

- Protect seniors at home from abuse by passing amendments to the Older Adult Protective Services Act
- Increase the Medicaid homecare rate to allow agencies to pay for increasing costs related to homecare and boost direct caregiver pay
- Pass a bill to deem individuals eligible for Medicaid right away so they can begin receiving care in their homes as soon as possible

Throughout the day, caregivers, consumers and providers told their personal stories, emphasizing that most people want to receive care at home, where they can be with their family, and live as independently as possible.

"Homecare agencies are struggling to pay all the costs associated with hiring caregivers," said PHA President Mia Haney. "As monthly enrollment figures for long term services and support nearly double, the need for more direct care workers is at a breaking point. One way of helping the situation is to offer better wages by including a Medicaid rate increase in next year's budget for these professional caregivers who many times are lifelines to thousands of Pennsylvanians."

Patients and caregivers who attended the State Advocacy Day spoke passionately about the need to pay caregivers a livable wage. "I can tell you what it means for me in one word: freedom," said Russell A. Myers, 90, a Marine Corps WWII veteran, living in York County. He has had direct care workers helping him for more than a decade. "I have a wonderful life and it's because of them."

"Home is the place where people want to be, they don't want to give up their independence," said Cindy Zembryki, who cares for her housemate, Barbara Yagle, in Potter County. Barbara also uses a professional caregiver so Cindy can get downtime.

Steve Myers, 44, of Northumberland County, receives 20 hours of homecare per day because of an accident that happened when he was 29. He says being a direct care worker can mean having a lot of responsibility. "I wish the state would allow more money for the agencies," he said. "They should be able to pay caregivers a higher salary."

"There has not been an increase in the Medicaid homecare rate in five years and we cannot expect agencies to keep up with growing costs without it," Hoak said. "This and other issues related to home-based care must be addressed by lawmakers."

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