

Hello. My name is Lynn Robinson. I am President of Easter Seals Colorado, a member of the Colorado Respite Coalition and co-chair of the Respite Care Task Force. I have also been a family caregiver for the past 17 years.

Before I go any further, I want to take a moment to talk about what respite care means to a family caregiver. Caring for a family member with a disability can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Respite is a break from continual caregiving. Respite care does not simply impact the caregiver's health and well-being - there is also a larger societal benefit. Providing respite care to caregivers is more cost-effective than out of home placement or hospitalization for the care recipient.

My experiences as a provider, an advocate and a caregiver have given me the opportunity to see the challenges surrounding respite from both the perspective of families and of providers. I would like to use those experiences to help illustrate how the Medicaid reimbursement rate is a critical factor in increasing access to respite services for family caregivers.

I want to start by sharing some of the common issues faced by families trying to access respite services. I will also share how the issues faced by families are related to the Medicaid reimbursement rates received by provider agencies.

In State Fiscal Year 2015, only Medicaid recipients only used 22% of authorized hours of respite care. If you were to superficially look at this utilization rate, you might not think that respite is much of an in-demand service. This could not be

further from the truth. The reality is that the respite funds available to family caregivers don't matter if families cannot access the service. Consistently, families tell us that they cannot find a provider. Issues range from a geographic lack of providers, an extensive waiting list for services, or the inability to find a provider willing to accept Medicaid for services. It is frustrating for families to be unable access the respite their loved one qualifies for. Often, families don't understand why accessing respite is so difficult. These are families that need a break. They do not need additional work to access that break.

To really understand why accessing respite care is such a challenge for families, we need to look at the issue from the perspective of a provider agency. Both the CES and SLS waivers pay \$19.80 for an hour of respite care. The simple fact is that figure does not adequately cover the cost of providing the service. Agencies struggle to attract and maintain staff at the current average hourly wage of \$11-\$12 per hour. This issue is only going to be exacerbated as the minimum wage in Colorado goes up. Given the difficulties of providing respite for the current Medicaid reimbursement rate, many providers are either closing their doors or only accept private pay clients, further restricting access to respite for families.

The older adult population is growing at rates faster than the general population. Between 2015 and 2040, the number of area residents aged 60 and older is expected to double from approximately one in eight to one in four. As Colorado's population ages, the need for respite is going to grow. It is crucial that infrastructure for respite care services is built to ensure adequate supports for the long-term. I firmly believe that it is cheaper in the long run to increase

reimbursement rates for respite as a preventive health service than to pay for out-of-home placement or hospitalizations.

Colorado is emerging as a national leader in the effort to better serve our family caregivers. Increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for respite needs to be part of a long-term plan to support all Coloradans; from the individuals with special needs to their struggling family caregivers to the businesses who employ them to the professional providers giving the caregivers a chance to breathe. A rate increase is not a luxury. It is an absolute necessity. As an advocate for caregivers across the lifespan, I truly believe that even a modest rate increase will greatly impact Colorado's growing number of family caregivers, and will reduce costs to our state in the long run.

**As a member of the Colorado Respite Coalition and a committed Caregiver I am advocating for a higher rate for respite care services. Increasing rates will help growth the pool of trained staff, keep individuals with challenges at home, and reduce out of home placement costs.**

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.