

February 20, 2009

Acting Secretary Sandy Vito
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
PA Department of Labor and Industry
1700 Labor and Industry Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Secretary Vito:

I want to again thank you for your telephone call to me in the late fall during which we discussed several work force issues including the Consumer Workforce Council. I am aware that there appears to be a push by at least some groups and organizations to find a way to establish this Workforce Council in Pennsylvania. I was very surprised to hear from you during the call that you had been advised that it was the senior citizens that could not find attendants to hire and therefore this council was needed for them to receive care at home instead of a nursing home. I told you at the time that I had not heard any Area on Agency on Aging (AAA) Director say that was true. I am writing today because it appears that this Workforce Council is still being marketed as something that senior citizens need in order to avoid nursing home placement or to return home from nursing home placement.

I believe that the continuum of services that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania makes available to senior citizens through the Department of Aging and the 52 AAAs is a well established system that is capable of providing timely, measured and necessary services including preventive services to senior citizens at various levels of need not just those meeting nursing home eligibility. Unfortunately, AAAs do have waiting list for many services other than the Aging Waiver. The Aging Waiver for nursing home eligible consumers is the service in which the senior citizens can make a choice for the consumer directed model and hire their own attendants. I sent a survey to the AAAs asking if senior citizens that choose the consumer model (personal assistance service) instead of the agency model had difficulty finding workers to hire. Only one AAA responded they often had difficulty and they attributed that to the low rates of pay. Two AAAs said that they occasionally had difficulty.

The real issue is how much money is the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, government and taxpayer, willing to pay these direct care workers for ill and disabled individuals. A workforce council is not needed in order to provide better wages and benefits to privately hired or agency employed direct care workers. Higher appropriations that allow the rates to be set higher for both consumer and agency models across the Departments of Welfare and Aging would accomplish the task without creating a new and costly bureaucracy. One AAA director reported that they provide about 350,000 hours of service annually under the consumer directed model and he has not heard one complaint about consumers not being able to find a worker, but the agencies in his area have a high turnover rate due to low wages and no benefits. As advocates for senior citizens, AAAs are concerned about the availability of direct care workers

to meet the service needs of senior citizens irrespective of whether they are privately employed or agency employed.

It is my understanding that in the few states where a similar council was created, that it was created to introduce the consumer directed model. In Pennsylvania we have a well established consumer directed model. Is it needed here? The Department of Aging and the Office of Long Term Living will be working on new statewide rate setting for all the Waiver Programs over the next two years. The issues of wages and benefits for direct care workers could be appropriately addressed in this work if it is deemed a priority.

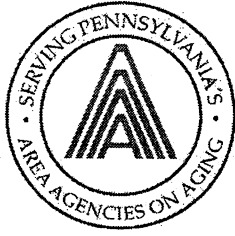
I have not seen any cost estimations of the increase in funding that would be required to increase wages and provide benefits to all the direct care workers, private and agency employed across the Commonwealth. Will that information be part of the discussion of the proposal? What numbers will be used to justify the number of senior citizens that were forced to a nursing home because they could not find an available direct care worker and where will those numbers come from? I ask these questions to point out that I have not seen any hard facts to justify the need for a new workforce council. I always try to look at the facts and would be pleased to review any information that you can provide that would answer my questions and concerns about this issue.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to you on the Consumer Workforce Council. I wanted to report the results of my survey of the AAAs in order to present another side of the issue. I appreciate the work you do for the citizens of the Commonwealth and your desire to make best decision on the issues you must decide.

Sincerely,

Frederick L. Shrimp
President
Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Cc: Acting Secretary John Michael Hall
Secretary Estelle B. Richman
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PA Association of Area Agencies on Aging Position Statement Regarding Proposed Consumer Workforce Council And Surrounding Activities

April, 2009

1. We do not feel that the CWC is the mechanism that will achieve our desired goals of improved wages and benefits for all direct care workers (both agency and consumer-employed) and therefore we do not support the Consumer Workforce Council.
2. We believe that the fate of the proposed CWC should be determined legislatively rather than by the executive branch.
3. We have not experienced a lack of direct care workers to meet the needs of our consumers or to keep residents of nursing facilities from returning to the community
4. We support the consumer/employer model currently in place in PA and oppose any efforts to weaken its structure.
5. We support increasing the voice of the consumer/employer. We believe in consumer choice at every level and oppose any model that weakens the ability of the consumer to choose, whether it be a worker or provider agency.
6. Many of our members have lengthy Waiting Lists for services. While we completely support improvements in wages and benefits for direct care workers, we are concerned that any increase in costs will result in increased Waiting Lists for our consumers.
7. P4A believes in a process which is fully transparent and provides numerous opportunities for comment and input by various stakeholders in a systematic fashion.
8. We are opposed to efforts to lobby our consumers whether to gain support for, or to oppose, the CWC.

Approved by the Board of Directors
April 15, 2009

Ratified by the Membership
April 16, 2009