

Polio Survivors Association

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Letters to the Editor
The Fresno Bee
1626 E Street
Fresno, CA 93786-0001

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To the Editor:

I was directed to your Web site to read your editorial concerning purported fraud in the state's In-Home Supportive Services Program (IHSS). I am troubled by two facets of this editorial. First, it is not signed or attributed to a person. Did this editorial float down to your offices from some ivory tower? Surely someone must have written it.

Second, it is obvious that this editorial was written from ignorance. It does not appear that the writer ever talked to an IHSS recipient or provider. Editorials expressing opinion are a valuable part of any exchange of ideas, but only if the editorial expresses *informed* opinion.

Is there fraud in the IHSS system? Probably. Just as there is fraud in home loans, highway construction, and agricultural subsidies. Any program that involves large sums of money will attract a few crooks. But, as in all of these anti-IHSS editorials, I can see no supportable figures of actual fraud.

Your editorial asserts that "the Legislature has allocated \$36 million to pay for increased IHSS fraud investigations, and to provide training, fingerprinting and paperwork for caregivers and recipients." This is an example of uninformed opinion. If the writer had checked, the writer would have found that IHSS recipients and/or the providers, themselves, are required to pay for these so-called anti-fraud measures out of their own pockets. It would have been much more productive if the legislature had allocated these funds to the various county agencies that do the actual paperwork. The present caseload for county IHSS workers is staggering.

Your editorial writer also states as a fact, that "everyone has an incentive to exaggerate the level of disabilities because it increases the household's income." This is not a fact! This is clearly an unsupported opinion! I repeat, this is an unsupported opinion! Did the writer talk to anyone, let alone "everyone!" This is not only a false statement, it is clearly libelous. Making a statement that accuses every IHSS recipient of wanting to cheat the system is slanderous and hateful.

I work with some of the state's most severely disabled IHSS recipients. I see no fraud. I see, instead, severely disabled IHSS recipients who are in almost constant fear of having their funds cut and losing reliable, caring providers. Now, your editorial writer is advocating this very option. Your writer says that, "A more straightforward way for government to deal with the

rising costs of IHSS is to acknowledge that the cost of the program has become too great a burden and cut compensation to caregivers.”

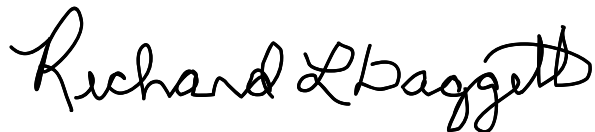
You want to cut compensation to caregivers? This editorial writer clearly has no idea how much, in real dollars, an IHSS provider for a severely disabled person makes per hour. This program pays for a maximum of approximately nine hours a day. That is the maximum allowed by state law. However, many of the most severely disabled recipients require a provider on call twenty-four hours a day. So, in reality, the recipient is supposed to stretch nine hours pay, at close to minimum wage, to cover twenty-four hours. Do you know someone who will work for one-third of minimum wage? Would you?

This editorial ends with the statement that, “government as a whole must do a thorough reassessment of the original goals of this program, which was to keep the elderly and infirm out of high-cost nursing homes.” It appears, at least to me, that this statement carries a bias toward the proposition that it might be unwise or fiscally irresponsible to “keep the elderly and infirm out of high-cost nursing homes.”

And, finally, the writer asks these questions. “Has that goal been achieved? Are taxpayers better served, and do the disabled live happier, healthier lives because IHSS has expanded?”

My reply is that the goal has not been fully achieved. We as a society are doing better, but there is still a built-in bias in favor of the nursing home industry. Are the taxpayers being served? My answer here is an unequivocal YES! I am a member of the American Academy of Home Care Physicians. Several years ago I wrote an article for our journal that compared home care costs to the costs for nursing home care. I found that nursing home costs were from three to ten times higher than home-based care; costs that are ultimately paid by the taxpayer.

And, “do the disabled live happier, healthier lives because IHSS has expanded?” This question does not even need to be asked. And, if the editorial writer had visited even one IHSS recipient, he or she would know the answer.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Daggett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard Daggett, President
Polio Survivors Association
Member, American Academy of Home Care Physicians