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Home care worker training will keep seniors in their homes *SB 1534 requires training programs for workers who provide in-home care*

SALEM – Oregon’s home care workers play a critical role in helping seniors and adults with physical disabilities stay in their homes and live happy, independent lives.

The Senate passed a bill today to support those workers and ensure a higher quality of care for those who choose to live independently in their own homes. Senate Bill 1534 – which passed on a 27-0 vote on the Senate floor – directs the Oregon Department of Human Services to work with the Home Care Commission to establish minimum training standards for home care and personal support workers.

“Societies are often judged by how they treat their seniors and those with disabilities,” said Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Portland, who carried the bill on the Senate floor. “The best way to ensure these individuals remain independent in their homes is to make certain they receive proper care. That means we must make adequate training available to those we entrust with this important work. Home care and personal support work are challenging professions. We need to provide the necessary resources to ensure these workers are able to do the best job possible.”

The training that will be required by the bill must be geographically accessible in all areas of the state, culturally appropriate for workers of all language abilities and considerate of the unique needs of each worker type. Training providers must strive to align training requirements with those required for care providers in other long-term care settings.

AARP of Oregon representative Jon Bartholomew provided testimony on the bill, highlighting the importance of people being able to live independently in their homes. Training home care workers will help people stay in their homes longer.

“One of the key elements of the term ‘home care worker’ is the word ‘home,’” Bartholomew said. “The vast majority of people who need long-term supports and services prefer to stay at home for as long as they can. Home is security, home is community, home is family. Home care workers help people stay in their homes, and with improved training that this bill sets in motion, we expect people will be able to stay at home longer.”

Home care workers provide services for seniors or adults with disabilities, while personal support workers provide services to individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, as well as those who are experiencing mental health issues. The only requirements to work in these fields are that an individual is 18 years old or older and passes a background check.

There is no licensing or training requirement for either job, but the Oregon Home Care Commission currently offers an orientation program and free training opportunities to home care workers and personal support workers, even though the training is not mandatory. SB 1534 requires training to make these workers more effective in their jobs, supporting seniors and Oregonians with disabilities. Disability Rights Oregon Executive Director Bob Joondeph provided written testimony in favor of the bill, during the hearing process.

“Most Oregonians want to stay in their homes for as long as they can, if home is safe and comfortable,” Joondeph said. “If the person experiences limitations in functioning, this may require a well-trained in-home care worker. These workers need to have the necessary skills to provide assistance with daily activities and must also understand that the person receiving the services gets to direct their care and has fundamental rights of safety and privacy.”

The bill now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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