

House Social Services Budget Committee

February 23, 2021

Lou Ann Kibbee, Systems Advocacy Manager

Thank you Chairperson Carpenter and committee members for allowing me to present my testimony to you today. My name is Lou Ann Kibbee and I am the Systems Advocacy Manager for Southeast KS Independent Living (SKIL) Resource Center. SKIL is a Center for Independent Living that advocates for the rights of, and provides services to, thousands of people of all ages with all types of disabilities annually across the State of Kansas. We fight for justice and equality with and for them, to have the same opportunities as other people do. Opportunities to live in our homes, receive the supports and services needed, receive an equal education leading to a productive and fulfilling vocation, develop relationships and families as desired, get involved in our communities, and partake in recreation and hobbies as we choose. We are driven by a philosophy of consumer choice, in that we have the freedom to make decisions and choices about our lives, as well as having the dignity of risk.

SKIL would like to take a position of neutral on HB2249. We support the protected income level being increased and indexed to SSI. But we strongly believe that it should be indexed at 300% of SSI. There are still too many people who use Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) that are paying in monthly client obligations. If indexed at 150% there are individuals who will through time and COLAs, be paying a client obligation again.

We have already see this happen since the protected income level was increased to \$1,177 in 2019. After that increase the client obligation went away but because of the COLAs in 2020 and 2021, they are now already paying a client obligation again.

And for individuals whose client obligation was decreased but not eliminated, they are seeing increases as it gradually crawls up again. Most of these individuals are people who worked their entire lives to hopefully survive one day on Social Security, but because of a medical or disabling condition they need help in their home. Because of the need for this help, they are required to pay part of their Social Security in as a client obligation. Paying this client obligation

has put a large burden on all of these individuals who struggle to pay their monthly bills. Many times having to choose whether to pay their client obligation, rent or mortgage, healthy food, utilities, or maintenance of their home or vehicle. They are definitely not living comfortably.

These are real struggles by real individuals whom anyone could end up in their position at any time. Disability does not discriminate at all! We are attaching letters from a few of SKILs customers who have allowed us to share them with you in their attempt to help you understand that the protected income level needs to be increased to 300% of SSI. Kansas needs to join the majority of states that are at this level.

SKIL asks this committee to increase the protected income level to 300% of SSI so that all of these individuals are able to keep their money to live. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony!



Lou Ann Kibbee

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785-628-8019

Hello Kansas Legislators,

My name is Darlene Singhurst. I am a longtime resident of Neodesha, Kansas. I am 76 years old and receive in home services under the HCBS Medicaid Frail Elderly waiver. I receive 30 hours of service per week due to multiple disabling medical conditions of diabetes, congestive heart failure, arthritis and joint degeneration in my knees which I am not a good candidate for replacement surgery so I must rely on a walker for mobility. My direct support worker does house cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, and transports me for medical appointments. I have been a widow for several years and am guardian, conservator, and Social Security payee for my 25-year-old grandson, Terrance Wylie, who has an intellectual developmental disability and has lived with me for the last nine years. Terrance is not capable of performing any type of competitive employment.

The household income requires that I pay \$250.00 client obligation each month to receive my HCBS in-home services. I worked hard for many years as a cook in various local restaurants and cafes, not expecting that I would be widowed and given the responsibility and expense of caring for my disabled grandson. Also in 2007, my home was in a flood when I lost everything. With the help of FEMA I was able to purchase a used mobile home, which I am proud to say I have paid off. However, utility bills are high and groceries are expensive. Paying my client obligation is something I always do. I was raised to believe one always pays their bills first and does the best they can with what is left over. If I did not have to pay a monthly client obligation, it would help me to buy healthier food and pay my bills as I have struggled some months with the utility bills being so high. I would greatly appreciate any help you can give me and others in my situation. Thank you very much for your time!

Darlene Singhurst

Neodesha, KS

620-325-3639

Written with assistance from Ed Viers, SKIL Resource Center

Mrs. Singhurst is a proud lady from the "Old School" and sacrifices much of her time and limited resources for others. The \$250 client obligation she unfailingly pays may not seem like much to many, but that amount could make a big difference for her and Terrance, especially considering Mrs. Singhurst's dietary restrictions due to her diabetes. As stated above, Mrs. Singhurst has experienced many difficult hardships in recent years. If the protected income level can be raised to eliminate her client obligation, it would certainly improve her quality of life and bring it closer to the level she deserves. Your full consideration of her circumstances, and those of many like her, will be greatly appreciated as you look into and hopefully take action necessary to eliminate their HCBS client obligations. Thank you!

Ed Viers, Independent Living Coordinator

SKIL Resource Center

To the Legislators,

Hello, I am Patricia Hall from Pittsburg, KS. I am 70 years old and receive 29.75 hours of in home help through the HCBS Frail Elderly waiver. My Direct Support Worker cooks my meals, does housekeeping, laundry, grocery shopping, and takes me to doctor appointments. I have severe arthritis and spinal issues. My monthly income is \$1,290.12 and I pay a monthly client obligation of \$113.12 so I can continue to get these services. Not having to pay a client obligation would help me a great deal.

I live in housing based on my income which helps but I still struggle to keep my rent and other bills paid and to buy enough groceries to last the month. I try to budget what I can, but it is difficult to make sure I have household goods and cleaning supplies for my workers to use in order to keep my home clean. Sometimes I have to rely on my family to help, which I did not plan to do when I retired.

If I did not have a client obligation to pay that would give me a little more room to make sure that I can keep my bills paid and food in my house without having to choose between the two. Not having to pay this client obligation every month would be one worry that would be a weight off my mind and I could be a little more independent. I would be grateful for your help in increasing the protected income level so myself and others would not have to pay a client obligation. We need to be able to keep our money to help us pay bills and be healthy. Thank you for your time.

Patricia Hall
Pittsburg
620-240-4892

Hello Kansas Legislators:

My name is Addie McMillian from Liberal, KS and I am on the Frail Elderly waiver under Home and Community Based Services. I am 80 years old. I receive Social Security and a small VA benefit from my husband. I receive 47.25 hours a week of direct support workers in my home to assist me with supervision of showering so I do not fall, managing medications, cooking meals, housework, laundry, and grocery shopping. I have an inoperable brain tumor, essential tremors, spinal stenosis, osteoporosis, depression, chronic back pain, and severe arthritis. I pay a monthly Client Obligation of \$333.42 out of my Social Security to continue receiving these services. I would ask that you consider increasing the protected income level

Addie is unable to live on her own, so she lives with family where she receives some informal supports from them in addition to the formal supports from her workers through the FE waiver. I am afraid of having to go to a nursing home. I want to stay out living in the community where I can spend time and do things with my family. I feel safe where I am.

If I did not have to pay my client obligation every month, I would have more money to help pay insurance for my car and my cell phone which my family pays for now because I cannot afford it. I would also like to be able to help pay for some groceries or the utilities. Right now I do not have the extra money to do this. I would never be able to make it without the support of my family. Relying on my family financially was not in my retirement plan.

I would appreciate your help in raising the protected income level so I can keep my monthly income. Thank you for listening.

Addie McMillian

Liberal

316-323-7511 or 316-323-7506

To the Kansas Legislature,

Hello there! I am Lori Whetzell from Arma, Kansas. I have personal care attendants that assist me in my home because I am on the Home and Community Based Services Physical Disability waiver which allows me to stay in my own home. I get 40 hours a week plus Sleep Cycle Support of help from them. They help me with bathing, dressing, cooking, shopping, housekeeping, laundry, etc. I have stage four kidney failure and live with the side effects of flesh eating bacteria. I am 59 years old with a monthly income of \$1,510.00. I pay a monthly client obligation of \$333.00. I am writing to ask for your help to stop the client obligation requirement. Please raise the protected income level.

I live in income based housing which helps but I still struggle to keep my bills paid including rent. I never have enough to buy the groceries I need. Because of my health issues I have to be on a special diet that requires more organic foods that cost more than regular boxed or processed food that most people eat. Also as a result of my current health I have to be extra cautious about getting sick. With the pandemic the extra income would allow me to buy the necessary supplies to help keep me safe. The housing I live in is not in the best neighborhood. With an increase in the protected income level I would have enough money to help buy the food I need to help my health and find a better neighborhood that I could afford.

If I didn't have a client obligation to pay, that would give me the freedom to make sure that not only my bills are paid, food in my house that is healthy for me, but I could even take my grandbabies to the movies or treat them to a dinner out. I worked hard to be able to take care of myself and spend time with my family. Please help me do this by letting me keep the money I worked so hard for.

Thank you for any help you can provide!

Lori Whetzell
Arma, Kansas

620-704-6394

whetzellori@gmail.com

Dear Kansas Legislators,

Hello, my name is Alma Williams. I am 75 years old and live in Bronson, KS. I get services on the HCBS Physical Disability waiver with 44 hours a week plus Sleep Cycle Support. My workers help me in my home by cooking meals, housekeeping, managing medications, help with showers and grooming, getting to the bathroom, driving me to medical appointments, and reading my mail to me. I have glaucoma, scoliosis, diverticulitis, gout, arthritis, and have had eight hip surgeries. I live on my monthly Social Security check. I pay \$250.00 each month for my client obligation to keep my services.

I use a walker because of the scoliosis and am legally blind from the glaucoma. I need help navigating my home. The assistance from my workers are vital to me staying in my home. Without them I would have to go to a nursing facility. I want to stay in my own home.

If I did not have to pay a client obligation, the extra money would help pay my utilities and buy groceries. Because I have gout I have to be careful what I eat, healthy foods are so much more expensive though. I do not get food stamps to help with buying groceries. I also have some over the counter medications that I have to take all the time that I have to pay out of pocket for. I could use that \$250.00 each month to help with these things if I did not have to pay a client obligation. I would appreciate you helping to increase the protected income level so I do not have pay this and could keep my money to help with the things I mentioned.

Please support this to help myself and others keep our money to live healthier.

Alma Williams
Bronson, KS
620-939-4460

Kansas Legislators:

I am a 63-year-old residing in Bel Aire, Kansas with a traumatic brain injury. I am currently on the Physical Disability waiver with 25 hours a week for support. My balance has been off since the brain injury and my attendant has to assist with my daily personal care such as: showering, shaving, putting my shoes on. Without my services I would have more falls per week than I currently do and I fear I would need to be put into assisted living.

The services I receive are extremely valuable to me. I currently pay \$1,013 a month in client obligation, however; if there was a way to increase the protected income level and I could retain those funds, I would be able to do things that can increase the quality of my life. With the increased protected income level, I would be able to afford upkeep on the vehicle I use to get from appointment to appointment as well as household upkeep to ensure me and my families safety. At this time, I am unable to afford such things. I implore you to support the increase of protected income level for myself and others in the same situation with their own needs.

Sincerely,

David Bibler

Kansas Legislators,

My name is Catherine Snyder. I am a 66-year-old woman from Pittsburg, KS. I have a worker that comes in my home to help with housekeeping and laundry because I am on the HCBS Physical Disability waiver allowing me 6.75 hours each week. My monthly income is \$1,292.00 and I pay a monthly client obligation of \$115.00. I am asking that you help to increase the protected income level so myself and others like me do not have to pay a client obligation every month.

My disabilities are brain injury, spinal cord injury, fibromyalgia, degenerative disc disease, bone disease, arthritis, depressive disorder. I live in income based housing m groceries for the month. I receive food stamps to help with groceries but only get \$16.00 a month in assistance. I am grateful for any help but it does not go far.

I have a small dog for a companion to keep my spirits up and to keep the anxiety of isolation away, especially during this pandemic. Animals come with a lot of responsibilities which are not cheap. This dog is my roommate and my best friend.

If I didn't have a client obligation to pay that would give me a little more room to make sure that I can keep my bills paid, food in my house, be able to take medications, and be able to take care of my companion, best friend, without having to choose between the two of us. Not having to pay a client obligation every month would be one more step to giving me a little more independence. I would really appreciate your help and support in making the change to increase the protected income level so I can keep my money to use for other important things to help me be healthy physically and emotionally.

Thank you for your consideration!

Catherine Snyder
Pittsburg, KS
620-687-5034