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Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Governor, Lawmakers Must Work Together to Fast-Track Funding Fix To Protect Private Duty Nursing Care for Infants, Foster Care Youth

Jan. 5, 2018/JEFFERSON CITY, MO – Babies and children, including foster care youth, with severe medical disabilities are among those counting on Gov. Greitens and lawmakers to fast-track a funding solution to restore and to protect their critical lifeline to in-home private duty nursing services.

Infants and children who require a constant level of medical care are feeling the brunt of the Governor's recent cuts to the private duty nursing program that allows them to be treated at home. Many are on ventilators, have tracheotomy or gastric feeding tubes, IVs or require wound care. When private duty nursing is not available, the only alternative for these medically complex children is to remain in a hospital.

Gov. Greitens promised to work with lawmakers to find a funding fix to the cuts that took effect in July. Legislators passed a funding package during the 2017 legislative session, but the Governor vetoed it. Legislators formed a committee in September to try to help affected Missourians, including babies and children who require private duty nursing care. Six months have passed without a solution.

“The Governor's cuts continue to severely restrict access to care for infants and children, including those in foster care, with severe disabilities that require nursing services from either an LPN or an RN in order to remain at home,” said Carol Hudspeth, executive director of Missouri Alliance for Home Care. “Babies are unnecessarily spending months and months in a hospital until a private duty nursing provider can be found, all the while being away from their families and costing Missouri taxpayers a lot of money.”

There were 766 children receiving fee-for-service Medicaid private duty nursing services as of July, according to Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. This includes 102 foster children in the care and custody of the State of Missouri.

Gov. Greitens has to his credit made it clear that he is committed to supporting foster kids and families. The Governor has an opportunity to help the most vulnerable kids. This is especially important because it can be a challenge to find foster care families for medically complex children.

Clearly, the Governor and legislature want to more efficiently use taxpayers' money. The cuts to this medically vulnerable population of Missourians run contrary to this goal. These people were being cared for in the least restrictive setting such as their home, which cost taxpayers the least amount of money. Many of them now must seek care in a hospital, which costs taxpayers far more.

There already was a shortage of private duty nursing providers and nurses across Missouri with rural areas among the hardest hit. The cut to the provider rate that took effect July 1 for people who rely on Medicaid for their health care has been devastating. It has left many families with no option but to quit their jobs and move to the city where care is more readily available.

“Workforce issues already are a problem with providers competing with hospitals that can pay RNs and LPNs a much higher hourly rate,” Hudspeth said. “Agencies simply cannot provide needed care because reimbursement rates are not competitive or sufficient to allow them to hire more staff or retain staff to fill the need.”

Legislators understood the problem and increased the reimbursement rate in Fiscal Years 2016 and 2017, she said. With the cut that took effect in July, private duty nursing providers are now back to 2014 rates.

Hudspeth and others called for legislators to reverse the cuts as one of the first orders of business. Seniors, veterans and people with disabilities with serious health conditions are also being hurt by cuts to services to nursing homes and in-home services.

“If the Governor and lawmakers do not find a way to restore funding to nursing home, in-home and private duty nursing services, these medically complex children, seniors, veterans and people with disabilities will remain in hospital settings or without care. This is a mistreatment of Missouri’s most vulnerable populations and a misuse of appropriated healthcare dollars,” Hudspeth said. “Our children, seniors, veterans and disabled citizens are counting on our state’s leaders to find a solution for them.”

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