

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Sophie Walsh 271-3469

SB 608-FN, relative to family caregiver support in certain programs and child care support for kinship caregivers.

Hearing Date: January 14, 2026

Time Opened: 1:46 p.m.

Time Closed: 2:34 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Rochefort, Avard, Birdsell, Prentiss and Long

Members of the Committee Absent: None

Bill Analysis: This bill directs the department of health and human services to seek approval from Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to cover family caregiver support services as an allowable service under specified waiver programs. The bill also eliminates the child care scholarship cost share for children in kinship care.

Sponsors:

Sen. Watters

Sen. Lang

Sen. Fenton

Sen. Avard

Sen. Rosenwald

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Sen. Altschiller

Rep. Rice

Rep. Wallner

Who supports the bill: 272 people signed in support of the bill. Full sign in sheets are available upon request by contacting the Legislative Aide, Sophie Walsh (sophie.walsh@gc.nh.gov).

Who opposes the bill: 1 person signed in opposition to the bill. Full sign in sheets are available upon request by contacting the Legislative Aide, Sophie Walsh (sophie.walsh@gc.nh.gov).

Who is neutral on the bill: 7 people signed in neutral on the bill. Full sign in sheets are available upon request by contacting the Legislative Aide, Sophie Walsh (sophie.walsh@gc.nh.gov).

Summary of testimony presented:

Senator David Watters, Senate District 4

- This bill seeks permission for the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to include some services for caregivers under different programs.

- It will extend the family caregiver support services to qualifying individuals and take actions on child care support for kinship caregivers.
- Senator Watters noted how important the issue of caregivers has been to the Senate in recent years.
- In the United States, 1-in-4 adults are family caregivers. This means there are approximately 170,000 people in New Hampshire providing this care.
- Senator Watters understands the support that family caregivers need through his personal experiences.
- Providing support for the family caregivers who are providing long-term support services will be beneficial to both the caregivers and the people they are taking care of.
- Senator Watters acknowledged the growing need for kinship caregivers. Kinship caregivers are grandparents or other family members who step in to take care of children in their families. These caregivers need help in accessing child care for the children they are caring for.
- The first section of the bill will ask the commissioner of DHHS to contact CMS and include family caregivers under the specific programs outlined in the bill.
- Senator Watters explained that we have broad discretion in our waiver program to address the needs of the waiver's target population. 26 other states are already doing this, so there are models to work from.
- The federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) allows the state to exempt kinship caregivers over retirement age from Child Care Scholarship work requirements. The bill also does this in the third section.
- Senator Watters noted that the federal government provides half the funding for the Child Care Scholarship.
- The fourth section of the bill eliminates the Child Care Scholarship cost-share for children in kinship care.
- Senator Watters noted that the bill requires child care providers who contract with the Department to provide preventive and protective child care services to be trained in evidence-based trauma-informed care at no cost to the provider.
- Senator Watters introduced an amendment to the bill, noting the contingency provisions.
- Senator Avaré confirmed that there are matching funds from the federal government, and Senator Watters confirmed that the federal government provides half of the funding for these programs.

Wendi Aultman & Brian Clark, Department of Health and Human Services

- Ms. Aultman explained that the first part of this bill directs the Department to seek federal approval to include family caregiver supports and services, as allowable, under the Choices for Independence (CFI) waiver program and the Acquired Brain Disorder (ABD) home and community-based waivers.

- This bill does not create an automatic new benefit for individuals, but rather gives the Department the authority and ability to add those services when renewing home and community-based service waivers.
- The bill establishes a structured process that requires the Department to seek approval from CMS, implement approved services through rulemaking, and define eligibility criteria, caps on spending, and required safeguards.
- This is consistent with the Department's draft to implement what would be phased in contingent upon CMS approval.
- This bill also identifies examples of caregiver support services. The Department outlined their process of identifying costs for these services in the fiscal note.
- From a system's perspective, family caregivers are already providing a significant share of the support allowing individuals to remain at home, so some of these target caregiver supports may help reduce strain, prevent avoidable crises, and support continuity of care.
- The bill also helps with providing guardrails around the controlled framework needed to allow for caregiver supports.
- Senator Avard confirmed that this allows caregivers to stay home and take care of a family member without dealing with the financial burden.
- Ms. Aultman explained that it would allow for caregivers to receive counseling, additional training, education, respite, and have peers and access to support.
- Senator Avard asked if there is a long-term cost benefit.
- Ms. Aultman explained that when looking at utilization and services offered in other states, it is helpful to know we can get the federal match to provide those services. This will also present a cost benefit to the state in the scenarios where caregivers are deciding if they can continue providing care or need to utilize institutional care.
- Senator Avard asked if the counties would also benefit.
- Ms. Aultman confirmed and explained that both county and general funds are part of the CFI waiver.
- Senator Rochefort asked when the Committee could anticipate a fiscal note, and Mr. Clark explained that it is being finalized by the LBA.

Karen Hebert & Brian Clark, Department of Health and Human Services

- Ms. Hebert explained that the Child Care Scholarship program provides a subsidy for families who have less than 85% state median income. It requires families to participate in a work activity.
- This bill would require that the Child Care Scholarship program include retirement as a work activity, so that relatives acting as caregivers could qualify for this program.
- This proposed legislation is subject to approval of the federal government. The Department would like an amendment stating that, to ensure that we do get

approval from the federal government. Otherwise, it puts the federal funding stream at risk.

- Adding retirement as a qualifying work activity will cost \$290,000 to make system changes in the eligibility system and about \$20,000 for the cost of the staff that maintains and makes changes in the system.
- The bill also requires that the cost-share that families pay be eliminated, which would result in little fiscal impact. The average cost share is \$105 and there are 4 children receiving the respective benefit.

Jeffrey Santer

- Mr. Santer explained that he is retired and raising his grandson who he has guardianship over. This is very challenging with not only the cost of child care, but also finding access to child care.
- Mr. Santer was excited to see this group being recognized with the introduction of this bill.

Susan La Brie

- Ms. La Brie told a personal story about her and her husband's experience with accessing child care for their great nephew who lives with them.
- They received notice that they would lose their assistance if they did not start working or searching for jobs, but given their age and circumstances, this was not an option.
- Ms. La Brie was able to keep their assistance by enrolling in college, but they kept facing barriers in keeping their assistance. They ultimately lost their assistance due to college not working out and had to take money out of their retirement account to continue affording daycare.

Roger Desrosiers, AARP New Hampshire

- Mr. Desrosiers stated that he is speaking on behalf of both himself and AARP New Hampshire in support of this bill.
- This bill is essential for strengthening family caregiver support and providing child care assistance for kinship caregivers.
- Mr. Desrosiers shared a personal story about how he and his wife were caregivers for his father for about 18 years. They faced challenges working full-time and trying to meet the needs of Mr. Desrosiers' father. Resources were largely not available for them as caregivers during this time.

Deb Kroner, Monarch Care Partners

- Ms. Kroner stated that she is sharing the experiences of caregivers supporting people living with dementia.

- This bill could address the social isolation and grief that caregivers and people living with dementia experience, as Medicaid waiver programs could provide peer support programs and counseling.
- This bill could ensure that caregivers have the necessary education and skills regarding caring for those with dementia.
- This bill gives us the opportunity to keep our caregivers supported, healthy, and safe.
- Ms. Kroner hopes this bill gets passed because the caregivers of those with dementia are on a very difficult journey.

Anne Marie Serrine, Referral, Education, Assistance, & Prevention Program

- In her professional experience, Ms. Serrine has seen how inadequate support harms families emotionally, physically, socially, and financially. Many experience depression, chronic stress, and increased risk of alcohol and medication misuse.
- Ms. Serrine explained that in her experience working at a hospital, employees are given training, pay, and support. She emphasized that we are asking care partners to do the same thing, with only 11% getting trained.
- Ms. Serrine addressed the cost benefit and emphasized that when care partners receive support, education, and training, hospital stays are shorter and emergency department visits are less frequent.
- She explained it is quite common for caregivers to neglect their health and needs while focusing on others. She emphasized the importance of protecting caregivers, as our system relies on them.

Amanda Carter

- Ms. Carter explained that she works with kinship caregivers every day in her professional role.
- This bill is important because it recognizes and supports the people who are already doing this work.
- When caregivers feel supported, families are stronger and people are able to stay at home in their communities.
- This is beneficial to families and a good investment for the state because supporting caregivers costs much less than responding to crises.
- Eliminating the child care cost-share will help ease one of the many financial burdens that kinship caregivers are dealing with.
- Ms. Carter noted that this bill focuses on prevention and support, helping families before stress turns into a crisis. It builds on what families are already doing well and gives them the tools to keep going.

Megan Brabec, Save the Children Action Network

- Ms. Brabec stated that she is speaking in support of the bill.
- This is important for families who want to access early education to help their children thrive when they eventually go to school.

Lily Wellington, New Hampshire State Commission on Aging

- Ms. Wellington explained that when assessing the trajectory of the population ages in New Hampshire, the ratio of caregivers for every individual over the age of 80 is decreasing with time.
- In 2010, there were 7 caregivers for every individual over the age of 80. By 2030, we will have 4 caregivers for every one of these individuals.
- Ms. Wellington emphasized the importance of addressing this situation in planning for the state's future.

Judith Jones and Trina Ingelfinger, New Futures

- Ms. Ingelfinger noted that systems where retired caregivers must go back to work or school in order to qualify for the Child Care Scholarship is untenable. She noted that this is the only subsidy program in the state that does not have an age cap on its work requirement. She believes this is an oversight that can be easily corrected with this bill.
- Ms. Jones explained that this bill adds support services for caregivers and provides wide latitude to the Department in designing the support services.
- There are approximately 280,000 caregivers in New Hampshire dedicating roughly \$2.8 billion in care annually. The goal of this bill is to sustain caregivers.

Katherine Dickey

- Ms. Dickey stated that she is speaking in support of the bill.
- She shared a personal story about how her and her husband are raising 4 grandchildren. Their oldest grandchild came into their care while they were still working, so they were able to financially plan accordingly for that child's future. However, their younger grandchildren came into their care during retirement.
- As a retired couple living on a fixed income, they did not know how they would provide for their grandchildren.
- They have tried to find financial assistance to help pay for child care once they gain legal custody of their grandchildren, but learned they are not eligible because they do not work.
- This bill would enable their grandchildren to stay in early education and continue to thrive.