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Long-Term Care Advocates Sound Alarm on Budget Proposals

Olympia, WA - Following the release of the state House and Senate's respective budget proposals, long-term care advocates underscored the threat to our state's health care system and housing for older adults and other vulnerable populations if funding invested by the 2025 Legislature is not upheld in the adopted 2026 Supplemental Budget.

This statement may be attributed to Carma Matti-Jackson, CEO of the Washington Health Care Association, a nonprofit professional association for the long-term care community in Washington, representing 156 skilled nursing and 404 assisted living providers across the state.

“Last year, the State Legislature committed to stabilizing resources for those who rely on skilled nursing and assisted living, and we continue to call on them to uphold that commitment,” said **Carma Matti-Jackson, CEO of the Washington Health Care Association.** “While recent proposals by the House and Senate improve upon the Governor's proposed budget to claw back funding allocated by the Legislature, these proposals would still fall short of honoring that commitment made by lawmakers just last year. If adopted, our state would suffer unnecessary and inequitable cuts that undermine care and workforce stability. We can be proud of the high-quality services made possible by administrators and health care professionals, but reversing a

commitment made only a year ago would directly threaten our state's ability to responsibly care for our growing population of adults who rely on assisted living and skilled nursing."

Matti-Jackson continued, saying that "funding invested by the Legislature in 2025 has already been allocated by administrators to implement wage increases for care providers, often through collective bargaining. Those wages, appropriately, have already been paid and suddenly reversing course would create significant and unnecessary workforce instability that would increase barriers to care for the very people who need it the most."

Washington has the 5th highest wages in the nation, and we rightfully pride ourselves on progressive laws to protect workers such as paid family leave, paid sick leave, mandatory minimum wages and minimum salary thresholds that grow wages every year. These are the right things to do. Unfortunately, as our state continues its failure to invest Medicaid funding for skilled nursing facilities or assisted living, policymakers are pretending that they can place an order but skip out on the bill.

The proposal to decrease Medicaid support for assisted living and skilled nursing comes at a time of dramatically increasing need for long-term care services. Today, 16% of Washingtonians are 65 or older. By 2050, this population will double to 23% of all state residents – that's more than half the entire population of the Seattle Metropolitan Region today. The number of Washingtonians 85 or older will increase much faster, quadrupling by 2050 – fueled by the aging Baby Boomer generation, these older adults especially rely on skilled nursing for care.

"We are asking the Legislature to ensure that access and quality are supported by fully maintaining funding allocated last year," noted Matti- Jackson.

About Washington Health Care Association (WHCA)

Washington Health Care Association is a nonprofit professional association for the long-term care community in Washington, and represents approximately 75 percent of assisted living and skilled nursing facilities in the state. In partnership with these member facilities and business partners, WHCA promotes and advocates for healthy, affordable, and ethical long-term care at the state and federal levels. For more information, visit whca.org.

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