

For Immediate Release

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SAN DIEGO HOMECARE PROVIDER TELLS STATE LEGISLATORS ABOUT THREATS, “HUMILIATING” QUESTIONING DURING IHSS “ANTI-FRAUD” HOME INVESTIGATION; COMMITTEE CHAIR PROMISES TO INVESTIGATE UNWARRANTED HOME VISIT

Sacramento (January 27) -- An In Home Supportive Services (IHSS) homecare provider from San Diego told state legislators today that she and the quadriplegic for whom she has cared for nearly 25 years were threatened with termination from the program unless she met “immediately” with a fraud investigator from the state Department of Health Care Services (DHCS).

Nancy Jo Riley testified that she and her client, Michael Condon, a quadriplegic Vietnam veteran, were “randomly selected” for a fraud investigation last October as part of a new “anti-fraud” initiative by the state. According to Ms. Riley, the investigator asked her and Mr. Condon a long series of “humiliating” questions. He then said he could not understand why a person with a severe disability like Mr. Condon’s should be subject to a fraud investigation in the first place. He also said that Mr. Condon, whose hands are frozen in a fist-like position because of his disability, would “probably” be exempted from new fingerprint requirements for homecare consumers.

Several members of the Senate and Assembly Budget Committees at the hearing expressed serious concern about the October visit by a DHCS investigator, despite earlier testimony by the department’s Deputy Director for Audits and Investigations that no such visits were taking place. Promising a full investigation, Assembly Budget Committee Chair Noreen Evans (D-7) noted that no protocols or guidelines have been set up for unannounced home visits to investigate potential fraud. She suggested that such a visit last October was unwarranted and premature. Ms. Evans also expressed concern that without proper safeguards, individuals posing as fraud investigators could easily target elderly and disabled IHSS recipients for fraud and abuse.

“The state has slandered hundreds of thousands of dedicated homecare providers and those for whom we care as fraud criminals,” said Ms. Riley, a member of the San Diego-based UDW Homecare Providers Union. “I urge you to stop these unfair and unwarranted raids--I mean home visits. I urge you to stop these unnecessary background checks and fingerprinting that I cannot afford to pay for on my \$9.50 an hour salary. History will judge us on how we protect and care for our most vulnerable citizens.”

The requirements for background checks for the nearly 400,000 IHSS homecare providers, fingerprinting for 450,000 homecare consumers, unannounced home visits by state and county agents, and other new regulations were enacted last July as part of the 2009-10 state budget agreement.

The multi-million-dollar anti-fraud initiative resulted from claims by Gov. Schwarzenegger and his allies that fraud in the program was as high as 25 percent, even though every reputable study of the program has shown fraud rates of no more than one to two percent. For example, the Sacramento County District Attorney, who received more than \$3 million from the state for anti-fraud efforts, reported that after four months her office had uncovered a total of 19 cases of fraud out of more than 42,000 homecare clients in the County.