

CAREGIVERS SHOULD PROTECT, NOT EXPLOIT, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. HOUSE BILL 131 WILL HELP ENSURE THAT.

By Amira, Patient and Advocate

I know firsthand the fear of being exploited by those meant to help. My journey with the Medicaid developmental disabilities program began at age 10 when caregivers came to my home to give my parents a break. At 18, I went to college—one of the few people on the waiver to pursue higher education.

Living two hours from my parents, who did their best to watch over me from afar, I was navigating independence for the first time while managing my disability. My siblings were in Albuquerque, but I was largely on my own. While I was smart, I wasn't prepared to protect myself from caregivers who took advantage of me. Two sisters assigned to my care exploited my trust, using my credit cards to rack up over \$10,000 in debt. When confronted, they refused to take responsibility, leaving me in a frustrating battle where it was my word against theirs. That experience was a turning point—it pushed me to learn how to protect myself and advocate for others facing the same risks.

But I am not alone. Every day, people with disabilities trust caregivers with their safety, health, and financial well-being—only to become victims of exploitation, abuse, and neglect. After more than 33 years of relying on caregivers, I live with PTSD from the fear of being taken advantage of again. I worry that if I don't comply with their demands, they will yell at or even hurt me. I hide my valuables and money from the very people I'm supposed to trust. My parents have even had to fire caregivers who were high on drugs while on duty.

This is why I wholeheartedly support House Bill 131, which would expand disqualifying offenses, barring applicants with convictions for animal cruelty, identity theft, sex trafficking, and assault of a peace officer—crimes that should have always been automatic disqualifiers. Right now, too many caregivers with criminal backgrounds slip through the cracks, moving from one agency to another, preying on new victims. This bill would create stronger safeguards to stop the cycle.

HB131 is about protection, dignity, and the right to live without fear of exploitation. I want the legislators to vote for this bill while thinking about their children and their family members. Every delay puts more people at risk. Legislators must act now to pass House Bill 131. At some point, you or someone you love will need a caregiver. When that time comes, wouldn't you want to know they can be trusted?

