

Colorado CDASS 129 % Rule

Presentation at the PDPPC

July 26, 2023

My name is Kristin Rytter. I want to thank you for having me today. I will speak about why I believe that CDASS participants should be allowed to spend more than 129.99% of their monthly allocation when they have enough unspent funding to cover their occasional extra staffing costs.

You probably have already recognized that I talk with a computerized generated voice. Therefore, I mispronounce some words. Please, excuse my mispronunciations.

I realize that there are good reasons for the 129.99% cap on monthly spending. Not everyone is good at budgeting money in general. This cap on spending gives these people the opportunity to receive more training on budgeting. Hopefully, such guidance helps them stay within their allocation and to continue to receive CDASS funding. I want this opportunity for those people who really need to gain more budgeting skills.

However, going over the 129.99 % limit doesn't always mean that everyone needs any kind of intervention. This is especially true when people have more than enough unspent funding to cover their extra staffing expenditures for a month or two. I have been in this camp, and here is my story.

During the pandemic, I had to leave my home in Greeley and move closer to my family. I planned for months in advance to return to Greeley. I knew that re-establishing myself in Greeley would require countless hours of double staffing to train my new staff, so I saved my CDASS funding in any way I could.

For example, I spent many weekends with my parents, so I wouldn't have to pay support staff for two days out of the week. Also, I got a roommate to do most of my overnight care, enabling me to save even more of my CDASS funding for my return home. Like most people, I often became annoyed with my roommate.

Trust me, I didn't like making these sacrifices regarding my autonomy and personal space, but I knew returning to Greeley would require more CDASS funding than my monthly allocation. And I didn't want to go over my allocation and possibly go into a skilled nursing facility. So, I powered through, allowing me to have enough unspent funding to do what it would take to return home.

Anyway, I managed to save approximately five thousand dollars of unspent funding. I assumed that this was enough to cover any extra staffing expenditures that might come up with packing, taking the road trip to Greeley, and then training my new staff.

A month before my move, I increased my staff to make those last-minute doctor's appointments, run extra errands, interview and hire Greeley staff long distance, pack all of my necessary things for my road trip, and make the trip back home. At every turn, I spent my personal money on things for the move as well as care packages for my elderly parents.

See, my mom was newly diagnosed with cancer that filled her abdomen. And my dad, who needed two knee replacements, had to take care of her as well as their house. So, I bought my mom more comfortable clothes, so my dad wouldn't need to do the laundry every other day. I also bought different snacks to encourage my mom to eat.

Because of her cancer diagnosis, I considered delaying my move. But everything already was set in motion. For example, my landlord found someone to take over my lease. Besides, I needed to get back to Greeley to oversee a rebuild of my house that suffered significant water damage due to a flood.

I finally returned to Greeley on March 27th. A few days later, I started to approve my support staff's timesheets, like I had done a hundred times before. But this time, a couple of these timesheets bounced back saying insufficient funds. What? What went wrong? Did I miss read the amount of my unspent funding? When I double checked my unspent funding on my FMS's portal, I saw the amount that I thought I had, now approximately four thousand and five hundred dollars.

With further investigation, I found out the rule that prohibited anyone from spending more than 129.99 % of their monthly allocation even if they had plenty of unspent funding to cover all of the extra staffing expenditures. What was worse yet was there was absolutely no exception to this rule. This means that I had two support staff who were only partially paid through my FMS provider. It so happened that these two staff moved temporarily to work with me until I hired enough staff for me to survive without them. Knowing they could quit if they weren't paid in full, I had no choice, but to pay them myself.

All of those sacrifices that I made to save funding were for nothing. I still remember hanging my head in defeat. After getting over my despair, I became beyond furious. The 129.99 % cap not only made me pay my staff, but it ruined my plans to use a lot of my unspent funding on double staffing required for training my new staff. I calculated that I would never be able to use all of my unspent funding before my annual renewal when I would lose all of my funding that I so carefully saved up. From my own perspective, the cap is unjust.

You may think I just had a string of bad luck, causing more personal expenses regarding my mom. And these expenses caused me personal hardship paying my staff. But I was just experiencing life. Sometimes, life piles unexpected events on everyone. For instance, almost everyone has been touched by cancer.

Unfortunately, people with severe disabilities have many more moving parts to plan for. For instance, some of my new support staff suddenly quit, because this job is not for everyone. When a staff leaves without any notice, I have to cover the holes in the schedule somehow, as my physical disability is too severe for me to be left alone. Filling the open shifts often requires me to pay overtime.

I believe that a number of able-bodied employers experience a similar problem with retaining staff, especially nowadays. However, many people like me do not have the luxury of not having help for a day or two. If we did this, we would not get out of bed, eat, relieve ourselves, and take our medications. Therefore, we have no choice but to dip into our unspent funding to pay for overtime and then double staffing for training our new support staff. This is a necessary evil. So, let people like me utilize all of their unspent funding without being penalized for what they have to do to just survive.

When someone goes over the 129.99 % cap, perhaps their caseworker can check in on them and see if everything is OK, but don't make them go through unnecessary training for getting their needs met during rough times. Please, change the rules regarding the cap so that people like me can use all of our unspent funding to meet our physical needs.

Thank you once again for letting me raise an issue at your monthly meetings.