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Healey signs new home care law

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Gov. Maura Healey put her signature on legislation Friday to impose a licensure framework on the home care workers who help the state's aging population with non-medical care like dressing, meal preparation, bathing and more.

The new law, which was the product of House-Senate negotiations and reached the governor's desk last week on unanimous votes, attempts to implement ways to ensure safety for both home care workers and clients of home care agencies, an industry lawmakers say is underregulated.

"Massachusetts families deserve peace of mind when they hire someone to care for their loved ones at home," Healey said. "This law strengthens the safety, quality and accountability of home care across Massachusetts, giving families confidence in the care their loved ones receive and supporting the dedicated workers who make independent living possible."

The legislation directs the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to create a home care licensure structure that includes background checks and a worker's driving records if they offer transportation for clients. There would also be annual training and competency requirements including: identifying and reporting suspected abuse, neglect or theft; understanding Alzheimer's disease and dementia; and handling emergencies including safety measures and fall prevention.

EOHHS must also conduct a suitability review for all licensure applicants and post a list of licensed agencies online. The governor's office said EOHHS "will begin working on all facets of the new law in the coming months."

"Providing services at home where appropriate can be more cost-effective and beneficial to the health and well-being of consumers," Health and Human Services Secretary Kiame Mahaniah said. "I appreciate the work of the legislature and the Governor to now ensure the safety of these services by creating a set of standards so families know their loved ones can reliably access quality care in their homes."

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