

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

When case managers cannot approve what you need

Your case manager is not the wall. Your case manager is standing in front of the wall, absorbing your frustration for a system she did not design. Three walls actually govern every no: budget caps, policy limits, and risk rules. Learn which one you're hitting and the ask changes completely.

BY JIM PALASTY · 13 MIN READ · WORKING THE SYSTEM THAT EXISTS

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WALLS SHE DIDN'T BUILD

Budget caps. Policy limits. Risk rules. Every denial is one of these three wearing a case manager's name.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Name the wall



STEP 2

Make the specific ask



STEP 3

Escalate on the ladder

Questions that force clarity

The budget question	"What is the annual budget ceiling for this waiver line, and how close to it are we?"
The policy question	"What manual section or policy number governs this decision?"
The risk question	"What specific risk finding would need to change for this to be approved?"
The authority question	"Who above you has the authority to approve an exception?"
The timeline question	"By what date will I have a written answer?"

A STORY WE KNOW



Dwayne spent four months asking his son's case manager for "more hours" and getting nowhere. He was furious at her by name until a friend suggested he ask what, specifically, was stopping approval. The answer surprised him: the county's risk committee required a documented safety incident before approving overnight support, a rule buried in an internal memo he'd never seen. He requested the memo in writing, submitted his own incident log to satisfy the criteria, and had approval three weeks later. His anger, redirected at the actual rule instead of the person reading it to him, got faster results than four months of asking nicely.

NAME THE WALL BEFORE YOU TRY TO CLIMB IT

What matters, at a glance

Budget caps

Waiver spending is capped per person, per year, set by legislative appropriation. Some caps are hard. Some have exception processes nobody mentions.

Policy limits

Manuals cap service hours, provider types, and eligible ages by written rule, whether or not the rule fits your situation.

Risk aversion

A case manager who denies something unusual rarely gets disciplined. One who approves something unusual and it goes wrong can lose her job. The incentive runs toward no.

The specific ask

"More support" is unanswerable. "Six hours a week of community habilitation, service code H2015, starting next month" is a yes or a citable no.

Reasonable response window

Give a specific written request ten business days for a written answer before you escalate. Long enough to be fair, short enough to hold the line.

Get the denial in writing

A verbal no protects nobody and starts no appeal clock. A written denial citing the policy section is the document that opens the door upward.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

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|---|---|
| ☐ The three-wall question, asked in writing | ☐ A specific request with service code and hours |
| ☐ A written denial with the policy citation | ☐ Your state's fair hearing request form |
| ☐ Contact information for the supervisor and regional office | ☐ A ten-business-day response deadline stated in your letter |

YOUR MOVE

When the wall has a name and the answer is still no, here is the ladder

- 1 Ask which wall (budget, policy, or risk) is the reason, in writing.
- 2 Submit the specific ask with a service code, hour count, and deadline.
- 3 Request the written denial citing the policy or budget section.
- 4 Escalate to the supervisor, citing the specific rule you were given.
- 5 Escalate to the regional or state office if the supervisor cannot move it.
- 6 File for a Medicaid fair hearing if the service is waiver-funded and denied.

The case manager who says no is usually reading you a rule she didn't write. Aim at the rule.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

healthlaw.org · <https://healthlaw.org/>
 medicaid.gov · <https://www.medicaid.gov/>

Informational only. Not legal or medical advice. Verify current program rules before acting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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