



**SEIU**Healthcare.  
United for Quality Care

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Kim Ackerman, Direct Support Staff  
Whole Life  
SEIU 1199NE  
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Morning Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Kim Ackerman and I live in Canton, Connecticut. I am a Direct Support Staff member at Whole Life and have worked in healthcare for over twenty-five years. I come before you today to express how urgent the need for increased funding is in group homes like mine.

I have been working at the Mullen Hill Whole Life location for 3 years, but have worked in group homes for the last 8 years. In my role as a Direct Support Staff member, I work very closely with highly behavioral individuals. Some of these individuals do not have families and so we as the staff become their family. Being able to build these relationships with our individuals is one of the most fulfilling parts of my job.

With that said my job is also incredibly challenging. Not everyone could do this job. Working with highly behavioral individuals can sometimes be difficult. My coworkers and I have been bit, punched, kicked, and on one occasion I was concussed after a blow to my head. When these incidents occur, we do not blame the individuals but rather our subpar staffing.

We have been experiencing a staffing crisis in my home for quite some time, but it wasn't always like this. The unit that I work on has 4 individuals that we care for, and when I first began working here we had 8 caregivers. Over time this number shrank to 7, then 6, and now we often staff this unit with 5 caregivers. This is incredibly unsafe for both the staff as well as the individuals. Some of these individuals are 1:1 meaning they require a caregiver to care for them and them alone. Short staffing makes it incredibly hard to provide the care that they deserve.

One major issue when it comes to recruiting additional staff are the wages we earn. This is an incredibly difficult job and it is not easy to find someone who is willing to do it for these low wages. We do not make enough money to live off of, which forces me to work three jobs to make ends meet. I come into work every day at 6AM to pass meds for third shift because we do not have someone on third shift that is certified to do so. I then work my own shift which is 8AM-4PM, before heading to my second job. Most weeks I work every day of the week. This leaves me exhausted and stressed out. My life consists of work, sleep, work, sleep, work, sleep. I have no time for anything else. I am burnt out and so are my coworkers.

Group homes desperately need more funding. We cannot continue to be paid wages that force us to work ourselves to the bone every week while putting ourselves at risk because of low staffing. With additional funding, group homes could not only hire more staff, but they could pay that staff a wage that allows us to work less and give more of ourselves to the

individuals that rely on us. Please do the right thing and increase funding for group homes in Connecticut. Thank you for your time.