



Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. My name is Nikkia Collins and I live in Manchester, Connecticut. I am a Direct Support Staff at Sunrise and have worked here for over a year. I come before you today to ask that you increase funding for group homes like mine.

I enjoy my job because I truly love caring for people. It makes me feel good knowing I am helping someone to live a more comfortable life. Being able to build strong relationships with my coworkers as well as the individuals we care for is incredibly fulfilling.

My job is also very challenging. Sure some of our clients can be difficult, but it is the short staffing that really makes my job difficult. We are very short staffed at Sunrise, which often leaves us high and dry when staffing issues arise. For instance, when someone calls out it is rare that their shift is picked up, due to low staffing, and so whoever is currently working gets locked in for another shift. There are times when you're on the seventh hour of an eight hour shift and you're told you have to stay another 8 hours. This is incredibly problematic, especially when your children are being babysat and the sitter is expecting you, or when you are scheduled to run to a second job. Even worse, when you are locked in to work you can't do anything about it. If it wasn't for the fact that I am an 1199 union member I would have no voice at all in my workplace.

Another challenging factor about my job is the low pay. We are not paid enough at Sunrise, which is why many of us are forced to work additional jobs just to make ends meet. Every day we go into work to improve the quality of life for our clients, but what about the quality of our lives? Much of the staff at Sunrise, myself included, live paycheck to paycheck. We struggle to put food on our tables to feed our families. We work tirelessly to barely get by and it is not right. We are professional caregivers and deserve to make a professional wage, a wage that allows us to save and plan for the future.

Group homes like Sunrise need an increase in funding so they can afford to hire more staff and pay those people a living wage. My coworkers and I need help and you can give us that help. More staff would reduce the stress and strain we feel every shift. We would not be locked in to double shifts and could more easily plan our lives around work and spend more time with our families. With more funding group homes could afford to pay their staff better. This would change our lives. Making it easier to save money and ensure our families have the essential things they need. Please do the right thing and increase funding for group homes.

Thank you for your time.