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United for Quality Care

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Elana Davis, Program Aide
Whole Life
SEIU 1199NE
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. My name is Elana Davis and I live in Chaplin, Connecticut. I am a Program Aide at Whole Life, formerly known as Tri-County, and have worked here for 13 years. I come before you today to ask that you provide group homes the funding increase they desperately need.

I love my job because I love my guys. Of course these are our clients or the individuals we care for, but to me they're my guys. We play games together, I help them socialize and develop life skills, and through my work with them we've built strong relationships. I care for these people; I am a care giver at heart.

That is not to say that my job does not come with challenges though. Short staffing has made my job incredibly difficult. We have individuals who require 1:1 care, which begins to create problems when we have two caregivers to six clients, which is the reality on my unit every day. In fact, our day program routinely has one caregiver to five clients. How can we even pretend this is safe?

Management have been trying to fill these positions, but it is hard to attract professional caregivers for the wages we are being paid. As group home workers we are not paid a living wage. I am forced to work overtime just to make ends meet. It is challenging for me to meet the cost of typical life expenses. For instance, I recently had to take money out of my 401K simply to afford the down payment on a used car. We have no savings because we are not paid enough to save. If I earned a higher wage I could save money and spend less time working and more time with my family. I have adult children, but I am raising my granddaughter which requires a lot of my time. I would love to be able to spend more time with her instead of working tirelessly in order to put food on the table.

With increased funding for group homes we could address these critical issues. Group homes like Whole Life could hire additional staff. Group homes could pay their staff more, which would cut down on overtime and, therefore, staff burnout. This would undoubtedly improve the quality of care we are able to provide to our clients.

Please do what is right by our clients, by us workers, and by the state of Connecticut by increasing funding for group homes like mine. We could be caring for your mother, brother, father, or sister. Take care of us, as we would take care of them.

Thank you for your time.