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United for Quality Care

March 2nd, 2021
Yvonne Ellis, Residential Program Worker
Oak Hill
SEIU 1199NE
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. My name is Yvonne Ellis and I live in Ashford, Connecticut. I am a Residential Program Worker at Oak Hill in Coventry, and a union member of SEIU 1199. I have worked in the same group home for 30 years. I come before you today with urgency to ask for increased funding for group homes, so we can continue our mission to provide excellent care for our individuals.

I LOVE my job!! Why? Because I love caring for the residents in my group home. Over time, you get to know the residents, build relationships, become close, and become like family. I know that one of my ladies loves to dance and listen to Christmas music, while another likes baking (and eating). Being adequately funded and staffed allows me to facilitate such activities, thus enriching their lives. In these moments, I truly feel I am providing quality of life for people with disabilities. Oak Hill's vision is that people with disabilities be able to achieve their full potential.

However, over the past 14 years the cost of everything has gone up: gas, food, daycare, and medical insurance just to name a few. Without rate increases, how are we expected to continue? Management has attempted to fill vacant positions but it is hard when the wages just can't compete. The fact that 75% of my coworkers have a second job to make ends meet is a testament that we are not being paid enough.

You cannot live on \$14.00 an hour in CT with bills and family responsibilities. This all culminates in burnt out staff, especially with COVID on top of everything. Last year, we lost a wonderful young lady who got a job making \$8.00 more an hour, with better benefits.

So please increase our funding our funding to appropriate levels. We are the ones that make sure your daughter is properly fed. We are the ones that make sure your son brushes his teeth or that your nephew is dressed warmly. In the political process you often ask for our support and our vote. We are now respectfully asking you for your vote!!

I thank you for your time and consideration.