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United for Quality Care

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Tinisha Jno-Baptiste
Direct Support Staff, Mosaic
SEIU 1199NE
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. My name is Tinisha Jno-Baptiste and I live in Hartford, Connecticut. I am a Direct Support Staff at Mosaic and have worked here for one and a half years. I come before you today to express how urgent the need for increased funding is in group homes like mine.

I love my job because I am a caregiver at heart. I enjoy working with my clients, I like having a direct impact on their quality of life. It is rewarding to build new relationships with my coworkers as well as the clients we care for. This work is so important because not everyone can do it. It takes heart to do this work, and so as a society we need to support this work anyway we can – including financially.

I became involved with this work following a series of medical complications experienced by my father. A few years ago, my father had a diabetic seizure, two strokes, and ended up in a nursing home for rehab. The number of days our insurance would pay for him expired, and so ultimately my mother and I needed to care for him at home. I shifted my full time financial services job to remote so I could stay home with him.

He was total care, meaning we had to help him with everything. This is when I began developing the skills of caring for individuals, and found I was good at it. My father was home for a while, but after a mental behavioral episode it was determined that he would be best served in a nursing home where he could have medical services close at hand should he need them.

After this, I continued doing financial services work full time from home, but decided I would supplement my income by getting a job in a group home. Having experienced caregiving, I knew it was something I was good at and I knew it was incredibly important work. A short time later I got my job at Mosaic in Hartford. I was immediately shocked by the low pay. If I did not have my second job I don't know how I could survive off what Mosaic pays us. The only reason I am able to get by, pay my bills, and save just a little bit, is because I work over 80 hours a week and have a really good primary job.

My coworkers are not so lucky. While they provide life changing and uplifting care to our clients, they are paid poverty wages. Group home workers making \$14-\$15 an hour is an unrealistic. How can anyone expect to support a family on this wage? Everyone wants to save money and to achieve financial security, but this wage does not allow for that. Low wages also makes it difficult to retain talented caregivers, as they will leave seeking higher wages. This rampant turnover often results in poor staffing levels, which negatively impacts the quality of care clients receive.

At the end of the day, we know this work we do is important, our clients and their families understand that. It is clear the state does not understand this; otherwise they would put their money where their mouth is and increase funding for group homes so my coworkers and I can earn a living wage.

Thank you for your time.