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United for Quality Care

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Kevin Mackie, Direct Support Staff
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SEIU District 1199
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the committee. My name is Kevin Mackie. I am a Direct Support Staff person at a Network facility in Andover. I have worked in this field for 32 years, eight of those years in the day program. I love working with the program participants. It is incredibly rewarding. I am here today to talk about the urgent need to fund group homes, and day programs in Connecticut.

I currently work one-on-one with a participant who is very behavioral. My job is to provide enrichment by keeping him occupied with various crafts, activities, and life skills. It is challenging to keep him focused because he sometimes runs off, or becomes combative. It's even more challenging now because of Covid-19, prior to the pandemic we had the option to cook or go out, but we can no longer do those activities.

There are currently 8 staff members, and 15 program participants, out of which another staffer and myself are one-on-one with 2 of the participants while the remaining 13 participants are cared for by 6 staffers. Under normal circumstances (meaning not during a pandemic), we have 27 participants, and there just aren't enough staff members to take care of all of them. The mornings are especially problematic because the participants tend to show up even before some of the staff members are scheduled to begin work.

Our pay is completely insufficient for the work that we do. I can't remember the last time I went on a vacation, or bought new clothes, and I rarely get to spend any time with my friends, and family. In normal times I am scheduled for 40 hours, and I make up for the low pay by picking up as many as 35 hours at other locations. I would typically work 50 to 60 hours to make ends meet. Due to the pandemic however, we are limited to only one extra location, so I don't get to pick up as many hours as I need, and some weeks none at all.

When I do get to work those extra hours, I feel stretched thin. I wake up at 5:30 every morning, don't get home until 10 or 11, and hopefully go to bed by midnight. I am lucky if I get 5, and half hours of sleep at night. What little time I get off is usually spent recuperating from the stress, and fatigue of the job. When I do take a holiday off, I worry about the desperately needed earnings that I am giving up by not working.

If we got paid more, I wouldn't have to work as much. I would actually spend more time with my family, and less stressed over being able to pay my monthly expenses. Please

support funding for group home services. We deserve to be paid and treated better. Thank you for your time.