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SEIU 1199NE
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. My name is Lynette Singleton and I live in New London, Connecticut. I am a Direct Support Professional at Sunrise and have worked here for 20 years. I come before you today to ask that you provide group homes the funding increase we so desperately need.

Within my role as a Direct Support Professional I care for three individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities. I cook for them, clean up after them, give them their medication, help them with their hygiene, do activities with them, and help them socialize. I absolutely love my job because the people I care for have become like family to me. It's funny - the women I work with will actually refer to me as their sister. This simply goes to show how close you become with these individuals, it is truly special.

With that said, short staffing has made our job increasingly stressful. We have three shifts every day and are able to get by with one staff member on each shift. However, we only have three permanent staff to fill three shifts a day, seven days a week. We have three vacant positions that have gone unfilled. Other Sunrise homes along the shoreline are also in similar situations. We end up rotating staff between homes in an attempt to fill all of these staffing vacancies. Both my coworkers work over 50 hours every week and I am scheduled for 40 hours every week. The remaining shifts are picked up by subs from other homes. They can even be staff sent from homes with COVID positive individuals.

One day the people in my home are being cared for by someone they've known for years, the next day they're being cared for by someone they've never met and the day after that is yet another new person. This lack of consistency hurts the quality of care we are able to give to these individuals. We build reports with these people, learning their behavior and developing strategies to care for them. That is thrown out the window when you have an ever changing cast of caregivers. It is also very stressful for the permanent staff to leave your individuals with someone new, knowing there is an increased chance something will go wrong.

However, it is incredibly challenging to recruit talented caregivers with the wages we are earning. As I mentioned both my coworkers work over 50 hours a week, and they do this not only because there are shifts that need to be covered but also because if they didn't work this much they wouldn't earn enough to survive. I myself have a second job as a home care worker, working 30 hours a week with my consumer. That means I am averaging 70 or more hours a week just to make ends meet. We had a coworker who worked with us for years, but she left and found a job doing similar work and makes double what she made here. How are we supposed to retain talented caregivers when they can make much more elsewhere?

By increasing funding for group homes in Connecticut you can help us bring much needed improvements to this field. Group homes would be able to pay their staff living wages, which would allow us to work less hours, spend more time with our families, and not have to live paycheck to paycheck. Increased wages would also make hiring additional staff easier, reducing burnout and improving the quality of care we give. Please do what is right by my coworkers and I as well as the people we care for, and increase funding for group homes.

Thank you for your time.