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United for Quality Care

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Amye Stoddard, Job Coach
Journey Found
SEIU District 1199 New England
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Amye Stoddard, I am a Job Coach at a Journey Found in Pawcatuck, CT. I have worked in a group home environment for eighteen years, 8 years with Journey Found; starting as Direct Care Staff, then getting promoted to an Assistant Coordinator, Program Coordinator, and now working as a Job Coach. I come before you today to urge you to increase funding for group homes like mine.

I love my job. I love that I get work with the same people every day and that the work I do empowers them to make their lives better. As a Job Coach I work with people to find jobs. I help our residents find fulfillment in employment and become productive members of society despite the challenges that they face. One of the gentlemen that I work with, for example, is 2 to 1 in public, meaning he needs two caretakers to attend to him when he is out in the community. I get him up in the morning, give him his medicines, get him dressed, and generally get him ready to go safely out into the community. I help him with his job every day that he works.

We don't get paid enough for the work that we do. We are paid \$15 an hour, which is barely adequate. Under normal circumstances I live paycheck to paycheck and worry constantly about whether or not I will be able to put food on the table. Sometimes when I do receive a decent paycheck I will buy more food than I need and freeze it because I deal with food paranoia and don't know if I'll be able to afford groceries the following week.

Right now I am able to make ends meet, but only because of the number of hours that I work. I work 75 to 90 hours every week. On a few occasions I have even worked over 110 hours in a week! The amount I work has negative impacts on my relationships as well. I barely get to spend any quality time with my daughter, my boyfriend, or my dog. My daughter moved in with her father, 3000 miles away; she didn't want to live with me anymore because I'm never home. Aside from my boyfriend and my dog, I don't get to spend time with any other friends or family. I'm supposed to have weekends off, but I can't remember the last time I went out for a coffee, or a movie, or even attended church. I'm lucky enough to earn vacation time, however we never have the staff to actually take a vacation day, let alone a whole vacation.

There is a direct connection between the number of hours I work and the wage I earn. It is hard to address staffing vacancies and reduce people's hour load when you can't find people willing to do this job for \$15 an hour. Most people don't want to do this kind of stressful, physically demanding work when they can make the same amount of money stocking shelves or bagging food at the local grocery stores! As a result, we are chronically understaffed. If we were paid more, we wouldn't have to work absurd amounts of hours to make ends meet and we could attract talented caregivers to fill vacancies we currently have.

My colleagues and I are overworked, we are stressed, and we are exhausted. Please support funding for group home services to put an end to the exploitation of workers like myself. We deserve to be treated better and paid a living wage. Thank you for your time.