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United for Quality Care

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Theresa Passarelli
Residential Program Worker, Oak Hill
SEIU District 1199NE
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Theresa Passarelli, and I live in Waterbury, Connecticut. I am a Residential Program Worker (RPW) at the Oak Hill group home in Waterbury and have worked there for 22 years. I come before you today to urge you to increase funding for group homes like mine.

I love the work I do. I enjoy caring for my residents, and find great fulfillment helping them live more comfortable, happier lives. As a RPW my responsibilities include taking care of my clients' hygiene, getting them involved with activities and recreation, getting them out into the community, as well as following their behavioral structure and daily routines. Our residents spend more time with us than they do with their own families, especially during this pandemic, so naturally they are like family to us.

As much as I enjoy the work I do, there are definitely challenges. We are very short-staffed, which can make providing care difficult. This issue existed before the pandemic, however, it has only gotten worse because of COVID. We are a 24 hour home, with three shifts that require a total of 5 caregivers to staff. Altogether we only have eight members on staff, including a new recruit. To ensure that all shifts are staffed, my coworkers and I work tirelessly week in and week out. I am typically scheduled to work 37 hours, but I usually end up working 50 hours a week, including some days in which I work 15 hours continuously. We work double shifts and only go home to sleep. Some homes will use substitute care givers to fill staffing vacancies. We have avoided resorting to this because of COVID, and subs have only been considered in cases of dire need.

Short staffing has a domino effect that impacts our lives outside of work too. The Saturday before last we had a call out and couldn't find coverage, so I ended up working my regular seven hour shift and then an additional eight hour shift. At the time, my cousin was in the hospital and needed me to advocate for him but because I got locked into a double shift I couldn't be there for him. My cousin is a postal worker and was in the hospital because he had slipped on black ice and suffered a head injury. The doctors wanted to drill holes in his head, which he didn't want to happen, but had no one there to advocate for him.

Working the long hours I do leaves me and my coworkers exhausted and burnt out. To make matter worse our pay is horrendously inadequate. Many of us have to work two or three jobs just to make ends meet. It is insulting to work as hard as we do caring for others, when we are not paid enough to care for ourselves. Why is it that we are not treated like human beings? Why is it that we always have to fight for what we deserve? If we got paid more, I wouldn't have to work as much. I would be able to put some money away for retirement, and not have to live

pay-check to paycheck. Please support funding for group home services. Group home workers like me deserve to be paid and treated with dignity.

Thank you for your time.