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United for Quality Care

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Nathan Wise, Residential Support
Gilead
District 1199NE
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Nathan Wise, I am a Residential Support Staff and I am happily employed by Gilead Community Services of Middletown. Gilead was very recently named non-profit of the year by the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce. I love my job, and I love my work. I currently make \$16 an hour as a private sector healthcare worker, but I was not always in this position. When I began my career, it was 1975 and I made \$3.24 at a state institution where it cost the state \$500 a day to care for someone. By the time I retired in 2008, as a full supervisor, I made \$34 an hour.

When the State was ordered to begin closing State institutions and moving individuals into the community, mostly private care, the notion was that private employee's salaries should be upgraded to approach parity with those same state workers that were doing similar work. Even if the salaries were the same, the state was still saving millions of dollars a year by moving clients into community settings. Unfortunately, when I retired in 2008 and moved into the private sector for \$15 an hour with no pay raises, clearly an abrogation of the legislative objective from years earlier.

I am proud to be an active delegate in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's favorite union, District 1199. I can imagine that Dr. King would be outraged that, as of today, there hasn't been much progress made to compensate the work of dedicated staff in private non-profits in the state of Connecticut, commensurate with the continued needs of clients.

Our union president has stated that \$20 an hour would be justified pay rate in the context of the 21st century economy, and I am here today to appeal to your sense of justice and historical commitment for a fair wage for private healthcare workers. This is a reasonable and wholly responsible request, and I thank you for this opportunity to make my case for my fellow employees. I therefore urge you to make this a strong consideration, as you plan your budget – to increase funding for private non-profits, so that this long forgotten legislative intention may, at last, become a reality.