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United for Quality Care

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Terenda Woodard, Assistant Coordinator
Journey Found
SEIU 1199NE
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Terenda Woodard. I am an Assistant Coordinator for Journey Found in Southington. I have worked for Journey Found for 7 years, but I have worked in the same house since 2004 when it was owned by May Institute which puts me in the same house for 17 years. I am here today because workers like me need an increase in Medicaid funds so we can be paid a living wage and have affordable benefits. The increase in Medicaid would also help to attract workers so that we wouldn't have the massive staffing crisis we have in this field right now.

I enjoy what I do because I enjoy working with the clients. I love my guys. For me there isn't a better house in the state. These individuals are like family to me; they're like my brothers. I pick them up from their day program, pass their medications, talk to them about how their day went, take them to their appointments, cook for them, help them with their hygiene and many other things.

While I love doing this for these individuals I still have to sacrifice my personal life due to the shortage of staff throughout Journey Found. There is not enough staff to go around all houses which means while I should be working only 40 hours in my house I end up working almost 65 hours close to every week and then I turn around and help out other houses by working anywhere from 20 to 30 additional hours. This puts me at 90 plus hours a week.

We have many vacancies and right now we only have 4 caregivers total to cover 3 shifts seven days a week. We've had staff quit due to the pandemic leaving us to float staff from house to house. Staffing is so bad that Journey Found has been using staff from staffing agencies to fill our vacancies, which can be a problem because they get paid more than us, but are limited in terms of what they can do for our individuals. For example, they can't drive our individuals anywhere and they can't pass medications.

When it comes to my wages I'm able to make ends meet because I work 90 hours a week. If I didn't have to work 90 hours, and could just work my regular 40 hours and still be able to make ends meet it would mean so much to me. It would free up my time so that I could spend and enjoy time with my significant other. It does put a strain on relationships when you are working 90 or more hours a week.

Please help us by increasing Medicaid funding to group homes in the private non-profit sector. We need help. Thank you for your time.