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United for Quality Care

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Carol Blackburn, PCA
Norwich
SEIU District 1199 NE
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good morning Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Carol Blackburn, I live and work as a PCA in Norwich, CT. I come before you today to urge you to increase the funding for home care services, so that PCAs like me can continue to care for those who rely on us.

I have been caring for my mother as her PCA for a little over a year now. While I've only been a PCA for a year, I've been a care giver my whole life. After receiving my CNA certification at Bayview in East Lyme, I worked as a CNA for ten years in the state. My work as a CNA was in different settings, including nursing homes and hospice. It is no surprise I am drawn to this kind of work as my mother was a Registered Nurse, and growing up I wanted to be just like her. Now my mother is retired and is total care, relying on PCAs to help her with every task.

I love caring for my mom, she raised me and so it is now my turn to return the favor. With that said it is incredibly difficult work. I am not my mom's only PCA so there are times when I have help, but there are also many times I do not and this can be a very physically demanding job. During these times I must aide my mother with everything, including moving her, cleaning her, feeding her, helping her with her medication, and more.

This is the work of a professional caregiver, yet we are not treated like professional caregivers. With the wages we earn, I am constantly wondering how I'm going to pay the bills. My mother is retired and if it wasn't for my father's pension we'd be underwater. My income is not just for me but for her needs as well.

It is incredibly difficult to make ends meet on a PCA's income. I've had to put off paying bills or utilize food pantries. I've never had to do that before, but since I began working as a PCA I've had many firsts. After incurring a \$500 heating bill, I had to apply for heat assistance. We had our central air conditioning unit break which was \$4,000 to fix. That happened a total of four times and it wiped out most of the money I had put aside. There's no way to see these things coming, and with the money we make as PCAs these types of life expenses send you into financial crisis.

A lack of benefits is another issue plaguing PCAs. It is sad that we spend all day caring for others, but are not offered health insurance through our job leaving us unable to care for ourselves should a health emergency arise. We are also not offered a pension or 401K through our job so that we may save for retirement. When I go to retire, I will not be able to survive off what Social Security offers me so I will have to not retire or live off the state.

With increased funding for home care services in the state PCAs could be paid a living wage and receive the benefits we deserve. Please do what is right by PCAs and the consumers we care for.

Thank you for your time.