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United for Quality Care

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Aida Colon, Home Care Consumer
Bridgeport
SEIU District 1199 NE
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Aida Colon. I am a home care consumer from Bridgeport and I am here today to speak on the needs of home care consumers and the PCAs that support us.

I wear an arm brace, and because of that I need help with daily tasks such as bathing, cooking, dressing, laundry, and other house work. In addition, I am unable to drive and I need someone to take me to the grocery store, church, medical appointments, etc. I have two Personal Care Assistants (PCAs) who help me with these activities throughout the day: Linda, who works 40 hours, and Esther, who works 22 hours. The State caps the total hours at 62, and I have been trying to get this cap waived.

A few months ago my roommate passed away. While she was alive, she would help me at night, since I have a high risk of falling and injuring myself. Now that she is no longer with us, I need someone else to take care of me at night, but I can't get that help because of the 62 hour cap that the State has forced on me. My son, a truck driver, has been stepping in to take care of me at night, but it is a great burden because he has to take off of work to do so.

The state of Connecticut tells me that if I need 24 hour care, I should go to a nursing home. But I love my home. I am happy here. I want my friends and family to be able to visit me whenever they feel like, and I don't want to lose comfort of my own bed or the companionship of my beloved dog, Lola. As an otherwise independent woman, do I not deserve to the comfort and dignity of living in my own home?

I also believe that my PCAs deserve a living wage with mileage and benefits, especially healthcare. I believe that they deserve to get paid on time every time. I work together with my PCAs to fill in the timesheets and triple check before sending them out to Allied, and yet, my PCAs' paychecks are late or wrong at least every other week. Linda has two young sons and Esther takes care of her granddaughter. I have already lost three PCAs in the past and I worry that I will lose Linda and Esther due to the burden of having to get by on poverty wages and the stress of frequent delays and mistakes on their paychecks.

Their frustration is also my frustration. If Linda and Esther leave I will have to go through the time and trouble of finding new PCAs, training them, establishing trust, and building up their knowledge and confidence. I have to go through this all over again. Not to mention that I would miss Linda and Esther, who I've grown fond of.

PCAs like Linda and Esther take care of individuals like me. They need to be treated with respect and given fair wages, mileage reimbursement, and comprehensive benefits like any other professional. Thank you for your time.