



SEIU Healthcare
United for Quality Care

March 3rd, 2021
Cynthia and Anissa Johnson
New Haven
SEIU District 1199
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Cynthia Johnson and this is my daughter, Anissa Johnson. I live in New Haven and have worked for the last five years caring for my daughter as her Personal Care Attendant (PCA). I come before you today ask that you give PCA's like myself the funding we need to care for our consumers.

I love my daughter and have cared for her for her entire life; however, a series of events that began in 2015 led me to become her PCA. My daughter Anissa, lives with a rare case of epilepsy syndrome which causes her to experience a variety of seizures, one of which are known as drop seizures. In 2015, Anissa was walking to the store when she experienced a drop seizure and fell to the ground. When she hit the ground the doctors say she hit her face on the ground so hard that she broke her jaw in three places. She also had most of her teeth dislodged. Not broken, but removed from her gums by the force of the impact.

Recovering from this fall took almost two years. There were complications with the wire they put in her jaw, and my daughter was forced to eat only liquids for many months. My daughter lost a lot of weight in that time, dropping from 156lbs to 93lbs in nine months. In addition to her battle with epilepsy, my daughter struggles with bouts of vertigo as well as PTSD stemming from this fall.

It was during my daughter's recovery that I decided I had to stay home to care for her full time, and if it were not for the Medicaid waiver program I would not have been able to get paid for doing so. It has meant a lot to me to be able to stay home and care for my daughter, and to know her needs are being met. However, as a PCA working in the state of Connecticut, I am deeply saddened and angered that the needs of PCA's like me are not met.

PCAs are professional care givers. We go to work every day to ensure our consumers have the care they depend on, yet we are paid poverty wages and provided barely any benefits. PCAs like me live paycheck to paycheck. We do not earn enough to save anything, which is very stressful. We do not earn enough to save for the important life purchases, such as buying a house, and instead are forced to keep the tightest of budgets, sometimes having to choose between paying a bill and feeding our families.

On top of our inadequate wages, we are not offered the types of benefits others are offered through their job. We are not given any sort of retirement plan we can utilize or health insurance plan to fall back on if we become sick. Instead we must do our best to save pennies and hope it is enough when we are old and sick to live off of. That is wrong.

Connecticut must do more to meet the needs of Home Care workers. We are an important part of the long term care infrastructure in CT, and must be treated as such. The work we do allows people to live and receive care in their own homes with dignity. Although we are grateful for what Connecticut does, don't turn back now! If we were in other places, we know we would be in worst shape, but does that mean we are in such good shape that we, the State of CT, should be willing to turn its back on anyone less fortunate or should we do more? I love this state because of the care it has shown me and my daughter! Please, please don't turn your backs on us or many in need just like us!

Thank you for your time.