

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today as part of the White House Conference on Aging. We need your leadership to help lift up thousands of caregivers and the people we serve.

My name is Gwen Carter, and I have been working in the health care field for 20 years. I come from a family of health care workers – I grew up seeing my mother do health care her entire life – and I understand the difference that we have on peoples' lives. As homecare workers, our goal is to provide our consumers the opportunity to live a good life. I am able to help my elderly and disabled consumers to stay in their homes and not be put in facilities if they do not want to be.

Last year, I cared for an elderly woman who also had an acquired brain injury. My client LOVED being in her own home and she tried very hard to do things on her own to show that she did not need to be in a convalescent home. As her homecare worker, I reminded her to take her medication; helped her use a standing table to exercise her hands and keep her mind occupied; assisted her in showering and dressing; prepared her meals, cleaned her house, and took care of the cat she loved. However, sometimes her desire to be independent and prove she was capable to stay in her home meant she took more risks and put herself at higher risk of fall or injury. For example, every time she went to the bathroom we had to pull her wheelchair out of the bathroom because if we didn't, she would try to stand up and get back in her wheelchair without supervision. Because she did not realize the extent of her limitations, I had to be extremely vigilant and watch her carefully. In addition to caring for her physical needs, I kept her active socially. Sometimes I would bring her out to go to a play or a concert, or make a trip to the beach. These outings brought her a great deal of joy, but were very taxing on me – physically, mentally, and emotionally. I put a lot of energy and effort into making sure everything was done correctly so that my client was comfortable and happy.

I feel that we, the home care workers, should also have the opportunity to have a good life and be secure in taking care of our own families, too. Sadly, as it stands, we are not able to do so.

We are only paid \$12.61 an hour for our work providing state-funded home care to the elderly and people with physical disabilities or brain injuries because, we are told, there isn't enough money in the budget to pay a little bit more. At the time I was caring for my elderly client, I had two other clients just to make ends meet and that still didn't cut it. Even working 6 days per week, with

wages so low I still had to get assistance from the state. I received food stamps and medical and while I am thankful for that, I don't want to have to rely on state assistance.

We also do not have workers compensation coverage if we get hurt on the job – leaving us AND our consumers at great risk – because, we are told, there isn't enough money for us. Once, when caring for a client who had a wheelchair ramp, her ramp malfunctioned and I had to let the ramp down manually. However, it slipped out of my hands and fell on my ankle. Because I had no workers comp insurance I had no choice but to continue working, suffering in extreme pain and furthering my injury by working on it. My ankle would swell every day I worked, and this went on for months. Every now, 6 years later, if I spend too much time on my feet, my ankle will swell again. It probably never healed correctly.

Training is also absolutely necessary to provide high quality, safe care to our clients. When I started providing state-funded homecare, I really didn't receive any training. Luckily, I had received some training at previous jobs, and I was very persistent in asking questions to make sure I had all information I needed about a client's needs. However, we need better training to protect ourselves and our clients.

When will it be *our* time? When will there be enough for caregivers like me to finally make some progress, to some stability in our lives? In order to provide the best quality of care to our clients, we need a stable and well-trained workforce. And to have a stable and well-trained workforce, we need living wages and benefits.

Thank you for your attention.

Gwen Carter
90 Plainfield
Hartford, CT 06012