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Public Comment for the White House Conference on Aging (WHCOA)

TOPIC: Long-Term Services & Supports

May 5, 2015

My name is Nancy Minarksy and I've worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) in eastern Connecticut for over 20 years. I really appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the White House Conference on Aging about how to improve long-term services and supports – including nursing homes – for our aging population.

Like many of my coworkers, I entered the healthcare field because I always wanted to take care of people. As caregivers, we grow relationships with our patients and learn to love them like we love our own family.

One of those unsung heroes is here with us in this room. Laurie Novak has worked at the Davis Place nursing home in Danielson almost as long as I have. I remember one December years ago Laurie found a patient crying in his chair. He was upset because he was worried he wouldn't be able to spend Christmas with his wife. The two had been married for many decades and this would have been the first time they'd have to spend the holiday apart.

But Laurie didn't think that was right, so she arranged to surprise the patient and his wife by bringing him home for Christmas. Laurie didn't get to spend Christmas with her own family that year. But I think she ended up having the best Christmas of her life: when she brought the resident home, he and his wife and his whole family were crying hysterically.

That was his last Christmas.

The family gave Laurie an ornamental angel that she still puts on her own tree every year to commemorate that happy moment.

You *want* people like Laurie to dedicate their careers to providing this kind of care...but it's becoming increasingly hard to do. Because of cuts due to the lack of funding from the state, staffing levels have been cut and we no longer have time to stop and listen to our patients – the call bells ring all the time. And with our wages and benefits stagnant for the past several years, it is getting harder and harder to attract loving people like Laurie to work in nursing home care.

I'm speaking here today not simply as a veteran caregiver, but as the family member of a nursing home resident. My 78-year-old mother has been a patient at

Davis Place for a year now. My mom didn't ask for Alzheimer's. She didn't ask to be placed in a nursing home. All of her fellow patients are just like her. These patients deserve quality care. They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and love.

I'm not sure if you have family members in the nursing home. But I wonder: how would you feel knowing that you're loved one isn't receiving the care they deserve? You can't put a price tag on that.

The healthcare choices ahead for our county are challenging, I know. Please do all that you and the White House can to ensure that front-line caregivers get the resources we need next year, and for the years to come, to provide the best possible care.

Thank you.