

## **Vision of the New York Caring Majority**

My name is Bobbie Sackman, Member Leader, New York Caring Majority. The NY Caring Majority is comprised of older adults, people with disabilities, home care workers and family caregivers. We call ourselves the NY Caring Majority because all of us are connected to care and caregiving. We are the people who are most likely to get sick and die from COVID-19, as well as from economic crises and a dysfunctional health care system. We are the people who rise to provide care and save lives. We are building a movement to ensure that the Caring Majority is at the center of local, state, and federal responses to COVID-19. We know that the care sector and care work hold answers to re-starting the economy in a way that protects and supports all of us. On the other side of COVID-19, we will create a world in which all of us have the care and support we need to live full, healthy lives in our communities. In our vision, the work of providing care will be a respected and recognized contribution to our communities and our society. It will be a dignified and well paid job within a fast-growing and flourishing sector of a sustainable, humane economy.

**Care work is in high demand — but older adults and people with disabilities are struggling to find home care workers.**

Care workers have never been more necessary: New York's aging population is growing rapidly, our nursing homes are overwhelmed, and immunocompromised New Yorkers will be at home until a coronavirus vaccine is widely available. But care workers are underpaid for the critical work they provide — meaning older adults and people with disabilities struggle to find the care they need. For decades, our state has refused to invest in these jobs, paying workers a minimum wage and offering no benefits.

**We are care workers, older adults and New Yorkers with disabilities who know that care work is essential.**

Home care allows older adults and New Yorkers with disabilities to live and age in their communities with dignity, rather than residing in nursing homes and group homes. Home care costs less than assisted living, and is safer than our state's underregulated nursing homes. It's well known that existing regulations aren't enforced like for infection control and staffing levels. And older adults and people with disabilities prefer home care — they can live full lives with an aide to help with tasks like getting out of bed or buying groceries. Every time disaster strikes, home care workers are on the frontlines — providing essential services to older adults during coronavirus, supporting people with disabilities during the California wildfires, even dying with their clients during Hurricane Sandy.

**Systemic racism in NY's health care system falls disproportionately on POC dying from COVID-19.**

An appalling 84% (over 4 out of 5) of New York nursing homes where at least a quarter of the residents were Black or Latino had COVID-19 cases. By comparison, 33% of homes (1 out of 3) where the population was less than 5% Black and Latino had COVID-19 cases. Simply put, residents of color have been far more likely to live in a nursing home with COVID-19.

It's clear the state has failed to prioritize nursing home workers and New York's older adults — and particularly workers and older adults of color. Rather than continue to deflect blame, the governor should invest deeply in universal, dignified long-term care for all New Yorkers. The state needs to invest more funding into home-care services for better conditions for workers and to allow elders to remain home where possible with supporting family caregivers. It is time to address systemic racism in the health care system which includes long term care.

**But New York's Governor Cuomo is forcing care workers out of their jobs — right when our elderly population is ballooning.**

As we face an economic recession and a global pandemic, New York needs to create new jobs and stave off widespread unemployment. And New York's fast-aging population means home care workers will find jobs quickly. Yet New York

keeps investing in corporations like Amazon and Tesla that fail to create jobs, while cutting funding for home care — the single fastest growing sector in our state's economy.

New York State consistently undervalues the work that women, people of color, and immigrants put into our economy — and care work is no different. Home care workers are primarily women of color and immigrants who work hard to keep New Yorkers alive and deliver vital health care services — yet the Governor will not invest in this essential and growing sector.

When it comes time to choose between investing in care versus maximizing corporate profit, politicians across the board have always chosen profit. Now thousands of people are dying afraid and alone during coronavirus because of the care worker shortage.

**New York State can jumpstart our economy and ensure the health and safety of older adults and people with disabilities by investing in care workers.**

New York State's leaders have a choice: Create thousands of good-paying home care jobs and provide safe, quality care for vulnerable New Yorkers — or continue a failed job development strategy of tax breaks and subsidies for private corporations. Don't we all want solutions during this time of a pandemic and enormous job loss?

**We can create a future where every New Yorker has the care they need to live full, healthy lives — and where care workers are highly valued and well-paid.**

Care work can be a dignified and well-paying job for women of color and immigrants across New York. Care work can keep aging New Yorkers and people with disabilities safe and healthy in their homes. Care work can create hundreds of thousands of jobs in a fast-growing sector of New York's economy.

New York must start putting care work over corporate profit. It's time for the state to stop cutting funding for care workers, begin paying care workers a living wage and benefits, and invest deeply in care jobs to jump-start our economy.

Investing in the home care sector would be a positive development for our state—one that has the potential to lift community members out of poverty while creating a care infrastructure that allows New Yorkers to live and age with dignity in their own homes and communities. We believe that investing in the home care workforce and improving the quality of home care jobs is a sound investment for our state, and could facilitate economic recovery as we grapple with record unemployment.

In economic terms, investing in the home care workforce could save the state money. By increasing the supply of workers and bolstering access to in-home care, we can improve health outcomes and reduce costly interventions such as emergency room visits, hospitalization, and institutionalization. Higher wages can also enhance local economies by improving the pay, and therefore the spending ability, of workers in our state's fastest growing occupations.

Investing in home care also contributes to racial and gender equity. In New York State, approximately 80 percent of home care workers are people of color, including 72 percent who are women of color.<sup>1</sup> Nationally, women of color comprise the largest and fastest-growing segment of the broader direct care workforce; between 2016 to 2026, the number of women of color in this sector is expected to rise by 6.3 million, while the number of white women will decline by nearly 400,000.<sup>2</sup> By improving conditions for home care workers, we can directly strengthen the economic prospects of women of color and their families.

Currently, the state invests billions in economic development funds with questionable returns regarding jobs or benefits to those living in the state; using those funds to improve pay and supports for home care workers would enhance our ability to recruit and retain a qualified home care workforce, including paid family and friends acting as caregivers. We must look creatively at our economic development dollars and invest in jobs that will lift up women and people of color. Home care jobs are sustainable new green deal jobs. A caring economy holds great potential for sustainable green jobs while building New York we want.

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## **Lack of home care falls predominantly on female family caregivers.**

Lack of adequate home care leaves family caregivers, predominantly women, with more responsibilities. Many women feel forced to leave their jobs to provide caregiving to elderly parents, spouses or others. This threatens their own financial future and can be very stressful and isolating. Studies have shown that women who are family caregivers lose \$300,000 in lost wage compensation, pension and level of Social Security payments during the course of their career.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The roadmap to the long term care system we each deserve has been obvious for years. COVID-19 has tragically put a glaring light on the roadblocks. It is time to build a road leading to well paying jobs and dignified working conditions. Pogo said – “We have met the enemy and he is us”. We must do this as though our lives depend upon this – which the needless loss of thousands of New Yorkers show we do.