

Introduction

Senate Chairs May, Ramos, and Rivera, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for working together to hear about the challenges and solutions related to today's topic and for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony to this distinguished panel.

My name is Christine Pellegrino, I am a former Member of the NYS Assembly, a teacher, and a mom and daughter to aging parents. I am currently the Board President of All Things Home Care, a not for profit dedicated to improving the lives of the elderly, the infirm and the disabled.

All Things Home Care also seeks to work collaboratively and creatively, to support and elevate the role of home healthcare workers, to improve their quality of life, and ultimately to make a difference in affecting patient outcomes.

We know that consistent, quality home health care can be a stabilizing force for the homebound. And consistent care also has a positive impact on the sky-high cost of Medicare, by **decreasing** the likelihood of patient re-hospitalization.

We know that when homebound individuals receive consistent care, they are happier and healthier and safer — they get their medicines regularly, receive help bathing, stay hydrated and eat nutritious meals, and are monitored for signs of decline. They receive the mental health benefit of enjoying the company of a caring companion in their preferred setting—their own homes.

Now, more than ever, individuals want to stay in their home. We believe that everyone should be able to receive the care they deserve to live a life of dignity. Which makes the shortage of home care workers a real crisis for patients and their families and for us all.

The shortage of caregivers creates a cascading effect on families and communities, detracting from the overall productivity of the local workforce. When cases can't be regularly staffed or caregivers unexpectedly miss their assignments, care for the patient falls to a family member, who must choose between their family member and their job.

We cannot ignore the pending workforce shortage any longer, as the crisis is already upon us. Unstaffed cases and missed visits are a direct consequence of some of the various issues home care workers face.

Issue

- Home care workers are among the lowest paid workers in the health care sector.

- As such, they face significant barriers that can limit their participation in the workforce.
- Often, home care service providers rely on public transportation
 - Now, if you've ever needed or been forced to commute by public transportation anywhere in the **suburbs** of NY, you know how insufficient our suburban public transit system is.
 - Furthermore, roughly 25% of Long Island patients live in areas that are deemed "hard to staff" because they are not accessible TO public transportation, thus resulting in a situation where patients who **need** essential care in their home, have great difficulty receiving it.
 - And so, the intersection of a wholly insufficient public transit system and low wages means that workers must choose between spending their personal time on a labor intensive, hours-long exhausting commute, --- the unaffordable cost of rideshare options, ---- or not working at all.
- The reality is that suburban homecare workers may be forced to accept **fewer** assignments than they could **because** of their low pay ----- thus magnifying the crisis.

Our organization, ATHC, has launched a private transportation initiative for caregivers who need a ride to work because it gives the caregiver the ability and incentive to accept work and importantly - they are able to keep more of the money they earn.

Solution

All Things Home Care is calling for historic investment in initiatives that offer a broad range of support systems for essential workers.

- We support Sen. Gustavo’s “Fair pay for Home Care” legislation
 - We believe that those who provide essential care that keep individuals safe, healthy, and happy in their homes should not be relegated to a lifetime in poverty and should be paid a fair wage.
- We support Sen. May’s “Home Care Jobs Innovation Fund”
 - ATHC is calling for the appropriation of \$15M over the next 3 years which can provide critical support for initiatives like the Home Care Worker Transportation initiative launched by ATHC, as well as subsidies for childcare, broadband and cellular service, and other expenses.
 - This fund will create jobs as drivers and childcare providers in the human service sector, and would encourage the ***unionization*** of these workers
- In order to support Home Care agencies, local small businesses which are significant job creators we call for a raise to the reimbursement rate to include overtime pay for & holiday pay for caregivers. Agencies operate on very small profit margins and need to be compensated in a way that allows them to operate and thrive.

Thank you.