

**Testimony for Joint Public Hearing: Nursing
Home, Assisted Living, and Homecare
Workforce – Challenges and Solutions**

Presented Before:

New York State Senate Aging Committee

Chair, Senator Rachel May

New York State Senate Health Committee

Chair, Senator Gustavo Rivera

New York State Senate Labor Committee

Chair, Senator Jessica Ramos

Tuesday July 27 2021

Testimony Presented by:

Keith Gurgui - Resident

Town of Ulster

Chair's May, Rivera, and Ramos, members of the Senate Aging, Health, and Aging Committees,

My name is Keith Gurgui. I am a 30-year-old lifetime resident of the town of Ulster. For 12 years now, I have been living at home with the help of my parents in conjunction with 24-hour personal care, after a spinal cord injury in late 2009 left me a quadriplegic.

If it were not for the long-term services I receive, such as 24 hour personal care, occupational and physical therapy, and service coordination, I would not be here today. I simply would not have been able to survive at home. I would have undoubtedly been sent to a nursing home.

For nearly two months (from the end of May until last week), I was without an aide for four of my weekly days shifts (9 AM to 9 PM). The Homecare Agency did not have aides available to regularly filled the open hours. Thankfully, my parents who live in the same house, and my sister lives in Queens, were capable of helping me. However, the situation was far from ideal for anyone.

I am lucky to be able to have back up around in case a caregiver is unavailable, but my parents are aging and I should not have to rely on family members and unpaid volunteers to help me for weeks when an agency exists with a current contract to fill my case. I want to be independent in my own home.

The cause for the shortage is multifaceted, and those things have been exacerbated by the pandemic, but of primary concern to me is a stagnant wage and lack of recognition for Homecare work, full stop.

I was once with a different Homecare agency that paid roughly 5 dollars less per hour, and the experiential difference for me in turnover and quality of personnel is a stark contrast. Even with a competitive wage of \$16.50, my current agency struggles to recruit individuals to my case.

In terms of solutions, I do believe establishing a percentage baseline above 100% of the minimum wage could begin to at least raise the bar for the lowest paid positions and cases in homecare, particularly in the consumer directed arena. Many of the best workers I have had do this

work as a career, and the reimbursement and benefits (of which there are none) must be in line to make that lifestyle sustainable.

Please consider increasing Medicaid reimbursements for Personal Care Services and ensure that that increase goes to those Personal Care and Home Health Aides.

Respectfully submitted,

Keith Gurgui

26 July 2021

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