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United Healthcare Workers East

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Lucy Chen

*Acting EVP
**Acting VP

Rona Shapiro, Executive Vice President, 1199 SEIU Homecare

Contact: Helen Schaub

New York State Director for Policy and Legislation

helen.schaub@1199.org

212-603-3782

Good afternoon - Thank you Senator Rivera and Senator May for inviting us here today. I am Executive Vice President, 1199 SEIU in charge of our union's 60,000 member home care division. I live in Yonkers, home of our great majority leader Andrea Stewart Cousins and my own state Senator, Shelley Mayer.

Our members are employed at 45 licensed Home Care Agencies and most recently the Personal Assistants of both Concepts of Independence, one of the largest and oldest consumer directed agencies and Elara joined 1199SEIU.

The pandemic drove thousands of workers from their jobs at a time when we already faced chronic home care worker shortages.

A recent report from the City University of New York (CUNY) estimates 17 percent of home care jobs are currently unfilled and approximately 26,510 new aides need to be hired annually just to keep up with the growing demand for care. In addition, 71,680 workers are needed annually to replace the home care workers who leave these jobs. This means that there are tens of thousands of New Yorkers, and growing, who need home care services and they are either not getting the care they need, or they are receiving care in more expensive settings when they could be cared for at home, or working family members (mostly women) are unable to return to work because they are now providing care.

There are lots of reasons why home care workers left during the pandemic, but the biggest reason is the pay did not justify the risks they faced. Fortunately, most stayed because they are incredibly dedicated to the people they care for. The experience of home care workers during the pandemic, in many ways, epitomizes the extent to which they are undervalued as essential workers. They were the last to receive PPE and very often what they did receive was substandard.

And they paid the price. Because these are low-wage jobs, home care workers did not have the luxury of staying in hotels or taking an Uber to work. They continued to get on the subway and buses to get to their clients' homes and many got sick despite their best efforts to protect themselves.

One particular challenge in home care is the struggle to create full-time work, because so many consumers only receive authorization for a few hours a day. Many workers travel daily between two, three, and sometimes four clients in an effort to get to full-time hours. At best, all the travel puts extra stress on workers as they are spending so many hours away from their homes. At worst, they are spending significant resources on travel which erodes their already limited paycheck. When a client passes away, workers can suffer a dramatic loss of hours and wages.

Making home care jobs ones that home care workers will come back to and new workers will want is the challenge we face, and the pandemic has made it even harder. We must commit the necessary resources to improve the quality of homecare jobs to attract and retain workers in this field. Dedicating resources and implementing multiple strategies to elevate the role and improve

NEW YORK CITY PRINCIPAL HEADQUARTERS

498 7th Avenue
New York, NY 10018
(212) 582-1890
www.1199seiu.org

ALBANY
155 Washington Ave.
Albany, NY 12210
Tel. (518) 396-2300
Fax (518) 436-1140

HICKSVILLE
100 Duffy Ave., Suite 300 West
Hicksville, NY 11801
Tel. (516) 542-1115
Fax (516) 542-0919

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND
611 North Eulaw Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
Tel. (410) 332-1199
Fax (410) 332-1291

NEW JERSEY
555 Route 1 South, 3rd Fl., Suite 301A
Iselin, NJ 08830
Tel. (732) 287-8113
Fax (732) 287-8117

MASSACHUSETTS
108 Myrtle Street, 4th Fl.
Quincy, MA 02171
Tel. (617) 284-1199
Fax (617) 474-7150

ROCHESTER
259 Monroe Ave., Suite 220
Rochester, NY 14607
Tel. (585) 244-0830
Fax (585) 244-0956

BUFFALO
2421 Main Street, Suite 100
Buffalo, NY 14214
Tel. (716) 982-0540
Fax (716) 876-0930

SYRACUSE
250 South Clinton Street, Suite 200
Syracuse, NY 13202
Tel. (315) 424-1743
Fax (315) 479-6716

FLORIDA
2891 Corporate Way
Miramar, FL 33025
Tel. (305) 623-3000
Fax (305) 826-1604

WHITE PLAINS
99 Church St., 4th Fl.
White Plains, NY 10601
Tel. (914) 993-6700
Fax (914) 993-6714

GOUVERNEUR
93 E. Main St.
Gouverneur, NY 13642
Tel. (315) 287-9013
Fax (315) 287-7226

care will have value throughout the health care delivery system.

If we continue to treat these workers as we did during the pandemic and before, we will not meet the demand and we will continue to lose workers to better paying jobs or even lower paying jobs with consistent, full-time hours.

If we are serious about preparing for the increased demand for home care driven by an aging baby boomer generation and the preference to receive care at home, we cannot just assume workers will be available to meet the need. We must transform these jobs into desirable positions with salaries, benefits, and create a career ladder within the home health aide occupation.

The way to recruit and retain more home care workers is to continue to make the jobs better, as 1199SEIU members have won and continue to fight for.

- Family-sustaining wages, including pay for all hours worked;
 - We think Senator May and Assemblyman Gottfried's Fair Pay For Home Care Act calling for wages of \$22.50 per hour plus wage parity is a good start.
- Guaranteed hours of work so home care workers can maintain a steady income, and are not thrown into crisis when a clients' status changes.
- Good benefits, including health insurance, pension and paid time off;
- Career ladders within the home care sector replicating programs like the HUGS Aide program created in partnership with Healthfirst, with specially trained home health aides adding health coaching services to clients with diabetes, hypertension and their complications using goal setting, motivational interviewing to encourage healthy behaviors.
- Programs like the 1199SEIU Training and Education Fund have already won;
 - Occupational health and safety training, including access and proper use of PPE, robust injury-prevention programs, and creating workplace safety committees to address dangerous situations in the workplace.
 - Opportunities for career advancement through additional training and career ladders within home care, as well as increased pay for increased responsibility for advanced tasks. Making the worker part of the care team and using technology.
- Pay differentials for personal care assistants working with high need consumers.
- Pilot with home care agencies and managed care companies for career advancement in home care which would include increased pay, training, and the use of technology, to leverage the relationship between the client and the home care worker.
- Resources to help with extraordinary costs which make it difficult to get to work, especially child care and transportation.

The primary need is for more resources to enact all of these improvements, and we are fighting hard for additional dollars from the Federal government as part of President Biden's Build Back Better campaign.

There also needs to be careful attention to the home care delivery system, however. Too much of our current spending is frittered away on profit and the excess administrative costs of supporting over a thousand private agencies and we cannot afford to have a significant Federal investment to be diverted in the same way.

The State must release and implement the Request for Offers for Licensed Home Care Services Agencies, approved as part of the state budget last year, and contract with a much smaller number of highly-qualified, high-road agencies. Doing so will give the state a powerful tool to ensure home care agencies invest in their workers. It will also create economies of scale to reduce administrative costs and allow workers to put together cases for full-time work.

There are two paths ahead. One is to build a system of well-resourced, high-road union agencies and fiscal intermediaries, which make the investments necessary to recruit and retain dedicated home care workers. The other continues to allow profiteering managed long term care plans, agencies and fiscal-intermediaries to siphon off desperately needed care dollars to their own pockets.

We have to take the first path if we hope to have any chance at building a home care system finally values this workforce as a critical part of New York's health care.