



Testimony of Sunnyside Community Services, Inc.

Before the New York State Senate Standing Committees on Aging, Health, & Labor

Senator Rachel May, Chair, Standing Committee on Aging

Senator Gustavo Rivera, Chair, Standing Committee on Health

Senator Jessica Ramos, Chair, Standing Committee on Labor

Homecare Workforce- Challenges and Solutions

Submitted by Andrea Thomas, Associate Executive Director of Home Care

Homecare Workforce – Challenges and Solutions

Sunnyside Community Services is a community-based not-for-profit located in Western Queens. Our work is centered on the belief that every person deserves meaningful support to live their best lives in their community. We have been a provider of home care services for over 42 years. Currently we are an employer of over 1,000 home care workers. Most of our home care workers are not only providers of care in our community but are also residents of our community. Prior to the pandemic we provided Home Health Aide (HHA) training to over 300 new home care workers annually. In 2020, we were only able to train 75 home care workers due to pandemic restrictions.

We are proud that we continue to be a gateway for low-income, underserved individuals (mostly women of color), to enter a career path in health care, especially when the Queens County unemployment rate remains high. Home care is more in demand, and the pandemic has underscored the importance of having trained and prepared HHAs to be part of the vital healthcare workforce. Home care providers and aides are among the essential workers on the front lines in the battle against COVID and beyond. Home care is there caring for sick, elderly, and vulnerable New Yorkers...keeping these New Yorkers from being admitted to hospitals or congregate care settings and caring for them after being discharged from these settings. SCS has been part of this care continuum.

At the height of the pandemic SCS saw a 30% decrease of our workforce due to fear of the virus and lack of childcare among workers with school age children. The industry saw a turnover rate of more than 60%. Now is the time to invest in the Care Community.

A 2018–2019 statewide survey of home care agencies showed that 17 percent of home care positions were left unfilled due to staff shortages. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these shortages at the same time as the demand has increased: “A survey of 77 New York State home care agencies in Fall 2020 found that 65 percent experienced an increase in home care referrals during the pandemic, both from hospital discharges and from families and individuals seeking to avoid the risks of nursing homes. Yet 85 percent of agencies reported worsening staff shortages, as the pandemic-related dangers of face-to-face direct care work added to the already existing challenges of recruitment and retention. As a result, 76 percent of the agencies surveyed were forced to delay acceptance of new referrals or deny them entirely in 2020.” -The Case for Public Investment in Higher Pay for New York State Home Care Workers

As the federal government looks to invest in an infrastructure plan across the country, we need to invest in our home care workforce to ensure better quality jobs, a career path, and better wages for home care workers. Within the home care industry, there have been no funding for hazard pay to support our workers. Most home care workers across the State last received a wage increase in 2018. According to the New York Department of Labor, the median annual salary for home care aides is \$24,810. If this trend continues, entry in this field will continue to decrease, which forces those in need of care to find more costly alternatives.

Home care saves money; home care in New York is significantly less costly than the alternatives. A semi-private room in a nursing home is almost twice as much as a home health aide monthly cost. Care at home is the preferred option. A study conducted by the AARP shows that 90% of people 65 and older say they would prefer to receive care in their own homes.

The need for home care is only growing. The number of adults aged 65 and over is expected to increase by 50 percent between 2015 and 2040 in New York; that number is expected to double for adults over the age of 85 during the same time frame.

Home care saves lives and supports our economy. Home care allows caregivers of aging parents continue to contribute to the economy by working while an aide is in the home caring for their loved ones.

I am asking the senate to support Hazard Pay for our home Care workers, and a living wage, so that our home care workers do not have to rely on a safety net to live in New York. Support demonstration project and pilots that looks at different methodologies to pay home care workers that are assigned on 24-hour live-in cases or short hours assignments. Ensure that providers are reimbursed for the appropriate wage related costs and invest in recruitment and

retention. We are at a critical juncture, and we must act! Pay our home healthcare workers more to help with retention which ultimately results in better care for New York's most vulnerable population.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Thomas

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