

William Roe, LPN

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Good afternoon. My name is William Roe and I work as an LPN in two nursing homes in New York City – one in upper Manhattan and one in the Bronx. I'm also an 1199 union delegate.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak before this committee.

As I mentioned, I work as an LPN and have worked in nursing homes for over 9 years.

I used to work as a stock broker in an office on the 77th floor of World Trade Center. I was on my way to work when the first plane hit my building. I was so traumatized by the experience that I could not return to downtown Manhattan. Instead, I went back to school and got my degree in nursing.

Going into nursing was the right decision for me. As a stockbroker, I tried to grow people's retirement fund or increase their finances. But now I'm really helping people – especially at the point in their lives when their health is frail, and their moral can be low.

My goal is always to improve a resident's health, but very often residents' have a terminal illness and I'm the last person they are going to see. I try to make their last days as comfortable as possible and keep them as cheerful as I can. It's sad every time I lose a friend, but I feel better knowing they received good care.

Prior to the Covid pandemic, staffing at my facilities was good. We had no problem recruiting new workers and they stayed once they were hired. This is largely because workers have good pay and benefits that we've won through our union. Workers have good health insurance, we get raises every year, we have paid time off, and we have access to educational benefits.

Unfortunately, the pandemic disrupted the staff. When workers saw their co-workers get sick or die, many left. And today they are still afraid to come back, particularly with all the news of the Delta variant.

We need to get staff back in the building because the residents are sicker since the pandemic with more requiring IVs and oxygen.

This is the workforce challenge we have to overcome – workers need to feel they can walk into a facility without risking their health or the health of their family.

We need to make sure we have enough PPE, infection control plans are in place, and workers know the plan and are fully trained.

Finally, we need to pay workers wages that both reflects the risks they will face working in a nursing home setting when there is still a deadly virus. And, more importantly, we have to pay workers a wage that recognizes the dignity and importance of the work they do.

If we can keep them safe and pay them wages that reflects the importance of the work, they will come in the facility. The union benefits, raises, and training will keep them there.

Thank you.