

Testimony 7/27/21

Hearing on home care challenges and solutions

My name is Mary Lister.

I am a home care worker from Buffalo, New York. I am a founding member of the Queen City Workers' Center, and I organize with other home care workers throughout the state with the Ain't I A Woman?! Campaign.

I have been a home care worker since 2013. During this time I have served in so many roles for many different people. I have been a community habilitation worker for a young woman with cerebral palsy, assisting her in achieving her career goals. I have been a consumer-directed aide for an older non-verbal man who uses a wheelchair, helping him get dressed every day, and cooking, cleaning, tidying and tasks around the house. One of the people I currently serve is an elderly woman with advanced alzheimers, who requires assistance in every task of daily living, from eating, to toileting, to walking.

Not a single person goes into home care because it pays well. I have stayed in home care so many years because I love it. I enjoy assisting people to live the life that they want, with dignity and as much independence as possible, and I am good at it.

Most of my years as a home care worker I earned minimum wage. But I urge you to consider what is truly necessary to grow the home care workforce and to make possible a REAL minimum wage increase: an end to the 24 hour workday.

Long work hours in any field are correlated with increased workplace mistakes and on-the-job accidents. Many studies have found that, in the medical field specifically, rates of injuries and mistakes skyrocket during shifts longer than 12 hours.

In home care, there is no small mistake. A mistake in medicine could mean health complications for the person receiving care. A mistake in a transfer could mean a broken hip. And a mistake that injures the worker themselves can take them out of the field permanently, causing this issue to get worse.

The incidence of disabilities suffered by home care workers is confirmed by a study by the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability Statistics. They found that home care was the industry in NYC with the most workers to become disabled. In New York State, home care was fourth. 24-hour shifts is causing more people to become disabled.

Why this difference between NYC and NYS in general? In Buffalo and other upstate cities, the 24 hour shift is not yet common. Care recipients requiring round-the-clock care have generally managed to get split shifts rather than one worker doing 24 hours.

But if, as we are all hoping today, the minimum wage for home care workers increases, upstate home care agencies will have a huge incentive to start implementing 24 hour shifts for 13 hour pay.

This has got to stop.

If we want an end to the home care workforce shortage, if we want a sustainable and thriving economy of care, then we have to put an end to treating home care workers like disposable machines to be used up and thrown out. We need to not only raise the wage, but end the 24 hour workday. Please immediately support (A3145/S359), legislation supported by and created in large part due to the organizing of home care workers.

Thank you.