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Testimony
Senate Democratic Policy Committee Public Hearing
Supporting Home Care Workers & Consumers
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I am Matt Yarnell, president of Pennsylvania's largest healthcare union, SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania. Our union represents over 25,000 healthcare workers including nurses, nursing home workers, and homecare workers.

The Study

Thank you to Senators Tartaglione and Kim for your leadership in authoring resolutions for this study to be done. Thank you to the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC) for your work on this report.

It's undeniable that Pennsylvania is facing a caregiving crisis. Everyday, more aging and physically disabled Pennsylvanians are in need of homecare services. Meanwhile, wages remain stagnant, pushing workers to leave the industry or flee to neighboring states to better provide for themselves and their families. With an average wage of about \$13.50, we can't blame them.

That's why it's crucial we find ways to help this workforce. A strong union voice for caregivers is a necessary precondition for change.

Twenty years ago, when caregivers in Washington state founded their union, Local 775, they made poverty wages, with no raises, and no benefits. Today, Washington is seen as a national leader, where caregiving is a path to a quality profession with advancement opportunities, recognition, and respect.

In Washington, approximately 75% of the workforce is providing care in a robust participant-directed model, where workers are organized in the union. As a result, caregivers together with consumers have successfully advocated for a \$33/hr reimbursement rate and other investments to raise standards and quality.

Some workforce highlights include:

- Workers are paid based on their experience, ranging from \$21.44-\$24.34
- Health Insurance benefits for \$25/month
- Multi-employer sponsored retirement plan
- 1 hour of PTO for every 24 hours worked, up to 140 hours per year



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- Strong penalties, including penalty fees, damages, and interest, for late or inaccurate payroll.

In Pennsylvania, through our union, the thousands of homecare workers in the participant-directed model have been able to meet regularly with the Secretary of Human Services, Dr. Val Arkoosh to help improve our homecare system for attendants and consumers. As a result, Pennsylvania caregivers have seen modest improvements in access to and investment in training as well as improvements in enrollment and hiring processes in participant-direction. In addition, union homecare workers employed with agencies play an important role in ensuring resources are invested in frontline care. These are important steps forward, and yet there is much more Pennsylvania must do to ensure this workforce has the right to organize if we are to see improvements in our long term care system.

We need more investment into direct care workers and home care services in order to make sure we're able to provide care for the growing population of aging and physically disabled Pennsylvanians who need it. That's why we're working to grow the participant-directed model of care, and why we're supporting the legislature's work towards bolstering this workforce to make these good, union, family-sustaining jobs.

Benefits of Participant-Direction

The participant-directed model of homecare is the most efficient model. Under this model, eligible seniors and people with disabilities are able to receive services from a caregiver without having to go through an agency. This means the public dollars invested into their homecare go directly towards the care being provided.

Participant direction is the best, most efficient way to both provide care and to ensure accountability that public resources are invested as they are intended. In most other states, the participant-directed model is growing due to its efficacy. However, in Pennsylvania we are seeing a *decline* in utilization of this model. This is concerning, and we're glad Governor Shapiro and the Senate are taking this decline seriously.

The Path Forward

Budget Investment

There are several ways in which the Senate can help bolster homecare services in our state. The first is by passing a budget that includes Governor Shapiro's investment of \$21 million into the participant-directed model of homecare. This proposed state funding will leverage an additional \$27 million in federal matching funds, bringing the total investment to \$48 million. These dollars go directly to care, and would bring the states 8,000 participant-directed homecare workers up to at least



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a \$15/hour wage while providing benefits like Paid Time Off (PTO) for the first time ever.

Accountability

The second way we can support the homecare workforce is through passing legislation like Representative Benham and Ortity's [HB 2372](#), which simultaneously raises reimbursement rates while ensuring public dollars are making their way to direct care worker compensation.

As this study makes clear, one of the barriers Pennsylvania faces in providing quality homecare services is a lack of oversight of where public tax dollars are going under the agency model. Agencies are distributed reimbursement rates, but the state has no way of knowing what those dollars are spent on - they could be going to profits, to billboards up and down 95, administrative costs, executive bonuses, or wages - there's just no way for the state to know where that money is going. That's why legislators like Representatives Benham and Ortity are advocating for accountability measures for homecare dollars - to make sure dollars meant for care actually go towards care.

To alleviate this problem, the LBFC's report recommends the Departments of Human Services, Aging, and Labor Industry collect data on this workforce to help inform rate-setting, budget, and policy considerations. Currently, this data is not collected, and instead we rely on self-reporting to get a picture of agency wages across the Commonwealth. The suggestion by the LBFC and the proposed legislation by Representatives Benham and Ortity would alleviate the impacts of the lack of existing data by ensuring this workforce is earning a wage that is being regularly re-evaluated along the consumer price index.

Wage Board

Another way to strengthen the homecare workforce is through establishing a Direct Care Worker Wage Advisory Board, like the one proposed in Senator Saval's SB 1085. Known as the Good Jobs for Quality Care Act, this Board would determine a minimum wage for direct care workers, imposing penalties on employers who fail to meet the minimum wage requirements. Other states like Minnesota and Nevada have successfully implemented healthcare worker wage boards to stabilize the industry's ability to provide high-quality care.

This report affirms what homecare workers have been saying for years: that investment into homecare cannot wait. We need to lift rates with accountability measures, establish a wage board, and ensure workers have a voice and self-determination at their job.

Thank you for inviting me to submit testimony for today's hearing.



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