



## Companions & Homemakers™

**We know what you're going through.**

**Testimony to the Human Services Committee regarding Raised Bill No. 388, "An Act Concerning State Payment Rates to Homemakers-Companion Agencies."**

February 8, 2007

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen:

My name is Linda Johnson and I represent Companion & Homemakers, Inc. I am here to speak on behalf of our 1,100 caregiver-employees who provide essential services to the elderly population through the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders (CHCPE). These services include housecleaning, transportation, grocery shopping, medication reminders and meal preparation. We have provided these services State-wide through the Program since our inception in 1990. I am offering this testimony in connection with **Raised Bill No. 388** entitled "**An Act Concerning State Payment Rates to Homemaker-Companion Agencies**".

To get straight to the point, our employee-caregivers deserve a much higher wage than the present reimbursement rates allow. These dedicated individuals continued to transport their clients during the recent spike in gas prices using their own vehicles with no mileage reimbursement. Our homemakers mop floors, scrub toilets, clean refrigerators, and perform all the tasks that more skilled personnel do not provide. They also give their clients the companionship and support that so many isolated seniors need. Even though they could easily sign up with "Merry Maids" and almost double their salary immediately, most stay with us because of their true compassion for their clients and the satisfaction they receive from helping them remain independent in their own homes. It is time to fairly compensate them for their efforts.

Since 1995, the minimum wage in CT has increased by 79%. Gasoline prices have soared by 137%, while the reimbursement rate for homemakers and companions has increased by 13.5 %, adding a mere 40 cents per hour to the reimbursement rate over a 10 year period.

In contrast, during that same period, the reimbursement rate for home health aides has increased by 19%, LPNs by 28%, RNs by 18.7% and adult daycare by 28.7%. We are not saying that these increases were unjustified, but simply that our homemakers and companions' time has come.

During the recent gas crisis, many agencies stopped providing transportation services. Homemaker-Companion agencies such as ours picked up the slack, only to be told by DSS that transportation services no longer fell under the higher reimbursement rate for homemakers (which in the past we had always billed at) but, instead, would fall under the much lower "companion" rate.

This low reimbursement rate has come at a price to our elderly clients. Employee turnover is at the highest point that I have seen in my 20 years working with the Program. This affects not only our caregivers, but also our dedicated care coordinating staff that every day struggles to find an employee willing to drive Mrs. Jones 20 miles to her eye-doctor for an important appointment.

The stress level is at an all time high. The transportation services that our employees provide to our elderly clients are indeed essential. However, we will not be able to continue to do so for long with an hourly reimbursement rate of \$14.08 and no mileage reimbursement. There are many different ways to address this issue; for example, revisit the definition of the "transportation" category already in place, give direct reimbursement for mileage, or even enact a gas tax-credit to benefit these caregivers. Quite simply, something must be done. We can no longer afford to wait. Thank you and I would be happy to respond to any questions.

Tel: 860-677-4948 Fax: 860-409-2530 • 613 New Britain Avenue, Farmington, CT 06032

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