

Mr. Chairperson and members of the Human Services Committee:

I am in support of SB 388, an act concerning an increase in reimbursement rates for homemaker/companion agencies. As the manager of a small business servicing clients of CCCI through the CT Home Care Program for Elders, we need a substantial increase in our reimbursement rates to keep up with our costs and pay our employees a fair wage. I am also in support of the bill as a volunteer on the board of the CT Homemaker & Companion Association.

The role of homemakers/companions has increased in the past 10 years as care managers have sought ways to get more care for less cost. One of those ways is to have the elder person's homemaker or companion take the client to medical, social and other appointments instead of paying for livery services. The burden of the transportation expenses falls entirely upon the employee who uses his or her own vehicle. Homemaker companion agencies have no means of billing for those expenses as they are not livery service companies. Instead, homemaker/companion companies can only bill for the time they spend with the client

For too long now, the state DSS and access agencies have looked the other way as companies have had their employees transporting clients without reimbursing them for the expenses. Companies that refuse to transport the client end up losing the clients homemaking services to another company that is willing to additionally provide the transportation. Homemaker/companion agencies face the cost of reimbursing part of the auto expenses or risk losing the employee who can no longer afford the job. Many times, we perform these tasks at a loss for the sake of the client who must get to the doctor's appointment.

As it is, we operate on slim margins. The rising costs of liability and workers compensation premiums for this industry go up annually as fewer insurance companies are willing to take on the risk of these types of companies.

The state has set a precedent of increasing home health aides reimbursement rates by more than the overall state increase given to the CTHCPE to compensate the companies for their rising costs and pay their employees a fair wage. In 1995, 1996, and 1997, Home health aides received an increase of 10 %, 9.92% and 14.58% respectively. During those years, homemakers/companions received no increases. More recently in 2004, home health aide agencies received a 7 % increase. Homemakers/companions received nothing that year. We need your help and we need it now. We are asking for \$22 per hour for homemaker, which is a 39 percent increase, and \$21 for companion, which is a 49 percent increase. That would be the rates if the state had kept pace with consumer price index over the same time period that increases were given at other levels of home care. Please keep in mind that since 1994, home health aides rates have increased more than 66 percent, while homemakers have increased only 5.87% and companions a negative 6%. Home health aides do not provide transportation for the clients and therefore do not have the automobile expenses of homemakers/companions.

I ask you to think of this: The next time you go to a fast food restaurant, the person behind the counter is making more per hour than the people who are caring for the state's elderly keeping them in their homes.

Thank you,
Eileen H. Adams
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