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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
AN ACT CONCERNING HOME HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERSONAL CARE ATTENDANT WORKFORCE COUNCIL.
RAISED BILL NO. 6486
MARCH 8, 2011

Ladies and gentlemen of the Human Services Committee, good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Cathy Ludlum, and I am strongly opposed to Raised Bill 6486, which would create a Personal Care Attendant Quality Home Care Workforce Council. "What's wrong with that?" you may ask. "Isn't the purpose of the Council to improve the quality of home care by raising wages and providing other benefits to make the job more attractive?"

I am well-qualified to answer that question. I have 22 years of experience as an employer of personal care attendants, and I am a participant in the Personal Care Assistance Waiver. There are many reasons why I think the Council and the personal assistants union that will follow will be harmful both to PCAs and to their employers with disabilities. In the interest of time, however, I am going to focus on just four areas:

1. **Recruitment** — It is a fallacy to think that higher wages and benefits will solve the workforce shortage, or that it will significantly improve quality. Certainly, people deserve to be well-compensated for the important work they do, but when I am screening potential personal assistants on the phone, most of them say that the pay is reasonable. In Connecticut, we are paying the same wage as unionized Massachusetts, except that our assistants don't pay union dues; so they are actually making a bit more. I have found that if you set your standards high you will find reliable, capable, and caring PCAs. They are worth their weight in gold, and I make sure they know it. My fear is that the union, by trying to make personal assistance a full-time, permanent career, will bring in too many people who are just interested in the money. The strategy I have used for decades—and it has worked extremely well—is to hire people who have LIVES: families, other jobs,

school, religious obligations. When I support the personal commitments of my PCAs (including their strong desire NOT to be in a union), they show up eager and excited to work with me. I don't want to be anyone's 40-hour-a-week drudgery job. Both they and I deserve better than that.

2. **Turnover** — The union says it will solve the problem, but I think some turnover is necessary and even healthy. I am not talking about a 100% staffing change every month, but the idea that people will move on and move up. When I do face-to-face interviews, I ask applicants about their plans for the future. I want them to know that I am not the center of my universe, and that their aspirations are important to me. It is bittersweet when they leave to pursue nursing school, a career across the country, or life as a stay-at-home mother, but their success is also mine. I do not expect, nor do I want, a lifetime work commitment from them. Often I do gain a lifetime friend. We have all known teachers who have been in the field too long. They hate kids, they hate their jobs... the only reason they are still there is because they are trapped in a union-made Nirvana of high wages and benefits. They have lost any reason to dream about what's next. Transfer this problem to the field of home care: what kind of "quality" can we expect from someone who is this burnt out?
3. **Trust** — Before I would consider working with 1199/SEIU, I must believe that there is a way for us to work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. The SEIU has continually made strategy blunders that have prevented trust from developing.
 - Over and over, they have violated the critical concept of *Nothing About Us Without Us*. HB 6486 was written and introduced without representation from the disability community. A few months ago, the organizer showed up at a disability meeting with a handout called "Shared Vision." This offended everyone because none of them had participated in drafting this vision. More recently, I reached out by convening a meeting with the organizer, and she showed up with a facilitator and an agenda!
 - Their new theme song, called "Take 'Em Down," shows contempt and encourages violence toward "the boss." Whether they mean me as the employer of PCAs or the Council as my representative, I don't think I can work with people whose solution would be to "Smash 'em to the ground." The direction of home care should not be decided by who can create the biggest disturbance but by who has the best ideas.

4. **Cost** — At a time when Connecticut is closing some agencies and consolidating others because we can no longer afford an enormous bureaucratic structure, how can we even consider creating a new State agency that will duplicate what already exists?

I urge you to see Raised Bill 6486 for what it is, and to vote against it.

Remember:

The people united can never be defeated!

The SEIU is not the voice of the people. WE ARE.