Luis Acosta, Personal Care Assistant
Bill 6486
Human Services Committee, March 8, 2011

My name is Luis Acosta and I'm a PCA, living with Margie and taking care of her 24-7. Before Margie got sick, I used to work in security and I worked at Advanced Auto Parts. When I heard she was sick, I left my job to care for her. She was diagnosed in 2006 but it took a year for her to get into the PCA program, so the first year I worked for free. Her PCA waiver kicked in on Feb 8, 2007. I've been giving care for more than four years now.

In the PCA program, I have 25.75 hours per week. That's the maximum a PCA can have because they don't want to have to pay benefits or worker's comp. If I want to get paid for any more hours than that, Margie would have to pay out of pocket. So, I work for free constantly- I live-in so I do 50-60 hours extra each week. I work from the time she gets up to the time she gets to bed. I clothe her, get her food ready, feed her, pay her bills, get her groceries, and put her to bed at night. I also help her set up her meds on Sundays.

Because I live with her I don't have to worry too much about paying rent, but I do have to buy my food and pay phone bills. Half of my check goes to child support so the money doesn't go very far. I'd really like to buy my own car so that I don't have to spend hours waiting for the bus and riding the bus, but I can't afford it.

I can't prosper from this amount of hours. I'm trying to find another full time or part time job on the side, but it's really hard to find one. It's tough. If I got a job, it would have to be a night job for 4 hours or something while Margie is sleeping, since outside of that I need to be there for her.

If I could, I'd like more hours and more pay as a PCA. We especially need benefits. Up until this year, I've been uninsured, and I'm a diabetic. I went five years without any medication. I've had thousands of dollars in hospital bills. Because I couldn't get care my eyesight is getting way worse and my kidneys are beginning to fail. I just got insurance from the state 2 months ago, so just had my health checked out. The insurance is only temporary, though, for six months to a year, so I have no idea what will happen after that.

I'll stay with Margie until the day she dies. But it's hurting my health and my finances to do that. PCAs really need to be paid for all the work we do and in a way that's fair. And we need insurance, because it makes no sense to take care of people when we can't take care of ourselves.