

Olga Carrera, Personal Care Assistant
Bill 6486
Human Services Committee, March 8, 2011

My name is Olga Carrera and I've been a PCA working for the same client for four years. She is an elderly woman who is completely disabled and needs total care.

I am university educated in Public Administration in my home country of Panama in Central America. Prior to homecare I worked as an executive secretary and then in administration of human resources of a large retail company in Connecticut. After September 11, 2001 my company downsized and I was laid off.

In the years that followed, I could not find a job that fit my skill level. My friend, a nurse, suggested that try homecare work. She referred me to my client. In my church, I have worked helping the poor and doing missionary work, so this fit in my desire to help people.

I have one client that I take care of for 35 or 40 hours a week. I help with cleaning, dressing, helping her get ready for bed, cooking, toileting and feeding. I like being a PCA because I get to help people. The schedule is good for me, too, so that I can take care of my mother during the day and then be a PCA in the evenings.

I love my job but we can make it better. In my role as a PCA I have learned that this program has a lot of deficiencies. For instance:

- We have no benefits.
- We have no vacation time, no sick hours.
- For four years I have done this job and gotten no increases at all.

At one point, in 2009, my wages even decreased from \$12.05 to \$8 because my client needed extra care overnight under the same budget. When she resolved the situation, my pay went up to \$10.50. Not back to \$12. For five months, this was a difference of more than \$100 a week.

But, my co-workers and I decided to stay and cooperate with the program.

I have no insurance. I pay my doctors by myself. When I get sick I do nothing or I go to the community health center for low cost care. As a health care worker, I feel that it is unfair that I don't have health care coverage.

Four years is a long time at one job that has no benefits and no increases. I would like to stay and keep taking care of my client but I need more money to support myself and my mother. In December of 2010, I completed a Certified Nurse's Assistant course to improve my knowledge and so that I can bring a higher level of care. With my new skills, I would like to advance in the health care field.

I am calling on lawmakers to create a Workforce Commission so that we can get better wages and benefits. If you create this council I can vote to be in a union and we can together improve our quality of life. Right now I have no union and no way to a better life. Other healthcare workers can look forward to better benefits and working conditions. We should be able to stand together as PCAs to do the same.

Thank you for your attention.