

***Patricia Haugabook, Personal Care Assistant
Bill 6486
Human Services Committee, March 8, 2011***

My name is Patricia Haugabook and I'm a Certified Nurse Assistant and a PCA. I started working in home care in 2003, but my interest in the field started back in 1981. My mother died of breast cancer that year and I saw how important to her the nurses were—that how well they cared for her was so important. There were two kinds of nurses: the kind who really cared and the kind who were just there. We had to be with her and take care of her all the time to make sure she got good care and had good caregivers. It made me see I wanted to personally take care of her and get more involved. So I started working as a PCA.

Right now I have just one client and I care for her about 20 hours a week. She has an on-call backup, too, but she relies primarily on me. The 20 hours isn't enough to pay my bills though, and I'm really living paycheck-to-paycheck. I had three clients at one point and that was better. It's hard to find clients, since they seek out PCAs so all we can do is get on the registry list and wait.

I'd like more clients, but it still won't benefit me much, so I'm starting classes in June. I'm about to go school for phlebotomy because wages are better and there are benefits. I'll still care for my client because I have a bond with her— she's a good friend of mine. I don't want to leave her hanging without someone to take care of her.

It's important that every PCA has some type of stability like insurance for us. What if we get hurt on the job, who's going to take care of us? I do transfers and lifting, it's required for certain patients. My client right now is more than 400 pounds. She can move around that she doesn't need me to transfer her, but what if she falls? I'd have to call 911. The last client I had I needed a hooyer lift, it was old and it made it even harder. Each client is different and we have to use the equipment they provide. It's not always safe and we don't have health insurance or workers comp for if we get injured.

Think about it this way: you're going to get old one day. Anything could happen to you and I could be the person taking care of you. But if wages and benefits don't get better people like me have to leave the work. And then who is left? You want someone taking care of you who really cares. You don't want to take just anyone. But there are so few people who can stick with this work that you won't have much choice.

I love my PCA work but I need to think about making more money and getting benefits in the future. It's really sad that caregivers who really care just can't stick with this work because it doesn't take care of us. I hope that lawmakers pass a workforce council so that we can start making PCA work a job with a future. We shouldn't have to go back to school to get a different job just to get health benefits.