

March 13, 2012

My name is Flora Johnson and I'm a home care PCA from Illinois. I have been caring for my son Kenneth since he was born, but home care didn't become my full time job until about 2001. I love and care for my son, but if I didn't get paid for this, I would have to get a different job to get some income and meet our needs. We have to have lights, gas, rent, and all of that.

Without the wages we have won in our union in Illinois, I wouldn't be able to stay and care for Kenneth. In our first bargaining we won a \$2 increase over 4 years and it brought us from \$6 something up to about \$8. You can see you don't get rich doing this work, but getting an increase like that means that I can stay and take care of Kenneth instead of having to get another job.

Our union has also won important things like paid mileage, access to health care, and training. Things like mileage sound small but when you're paid very low and driving between clients every day it really matters. The state would probably have not realized some home care workers were driving many miles every week on their own dime if our union hadn't raised the issue.

Collective bargaining has really made our voices heard. We are going to have to pay for care one way or another. You can't get quality care if you're not paying a decent wage. If you get a living wage then home care workers can focus on caring for consumers, in their home, where they want to be. It's the best care that they can get. My son often tells me, "I don't know what I'd do without you."

The union opens up more avenues for us. We said we wanted paid training or health care; they wouldn't have gotten it or given it to us unless we spoke up. Our union talks to lawmakers face-to-face, tells them our stories. We protect our programs and make sure they know how important these programs are for our consumers.

And I can tell you first-hand, as a mother, the union has not changed how we manage our care. The consumer is still in charge.

I hope that this body will pass HB5433 so that workers in Connecticut can bargain like we do. That way you'll get to make home care a living wage job where people can stay with their clients and focus on care.

Flora Johnson
Home Care Worker
Illinois