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Support Bill 5433

I came here today to talk to you about what it is like for me as a worker in Oregon, where home care providers have a union and a bargained contract.

First, though, I need to say that I've been a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) since 1991 and I started out working in nursing homes. Just the same as people with disabilities and seniors don't want to be in intuitions, I don't want to work at one. Nursing homes cost taxpayers more but they provide less intimate care. We workers have to take care of as many as 20 people sometimes. It's backbreaking work and it results in less loving care for residents. Any time we can do anything to strengthen our home care system we should. It's cheaper and better for everyone.

From 2009 until this December, I worked as a live-in home care worker, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. My first client was having his wife take care of him, but the stress was too much and she began having heart problems. They contacted the state and hired me through our state's home care registry. I know Connecticut is setting up a registry right now—I think it's great. Many of the seniors especially aren't internet savvy so having one place to go to find a worker really helps them. It helps me, too, since that's how I found my job.

Because we have a union in Oregon, the pay in our state is actually better for home care. Our contract has raises, access to health benefits, and paid time off. It used to be that you had to work in a nursing home to get these things. Now, home care jobs are better in Oregon. I believe they should be better, since that's the only way you have enough workers in the field to provide the care consumers want.

CNAs have the highest injury rate of any profession. There are days I took 4 ibuprofen before going to work, and I'd come home and lay down feeling terrible. My last client was 300 pounds and we were able to get a Hoyer lift to keep me safe. Having a union and working with our case workers gives us a voice to get better equipment like this and keep us safe. The equipment improved my client's quality of life too- he could move around more and we could bathe him more easily, more often.

With a union we have networking. We're like a family in our union. When my job with my client ended and I wasn't sure where to go or what to do next, I went to my union and my coworkers helped me figure out where to go and what to do. They helped me use the registry to connect with a new client. With the union we have a community of the people who care.

We also have a voice for what we need. When we bargain, we're asking for the improvements that can keep us from having to leave our clients to seek better work. It's wonderful because it makes our priorities matter. We know that resources are limited so we can work with lawmakers to make sure they're used in the best way possible.

It's better for both workers and consumers when we have a union for home care workers. My union has helped me become a better home care provider and has definitely made the work more stable and attractive. I encourage Connecticut to pass this bill and give workers in your state the same opportunity to make care a career that I have.