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Thank you to the members of the Human Service committee for allowing me to testify on HB 6947. My name is Marie Charleston. I am a direct care worker, providing care to people with developmental disabilities. I have been in the DDS field for over 19 years. I work two jobs at private sector not-for-profit companies providing the same care at both.

Please support HB 6947 because it raises awareness about the need for better reimbursement rates for our agencies. However, please amend the bill to ensure the state reimburses agencies to cover the true cost of care, not just one uniform rate.

In addition to reimbursing agencies for the true cost of care, the bill should also include reimbursement rates based on paying all direct care workers a starting rate of pay of \$15 an hour, and support a wage increase of 4.5 % wage this year, and next year, for all workers currently making more than \$15 an hour.

These things are very important to me. As a wife and mother I have to make sacrifices in order for to provide for my family. Over the last seven years I've worked two full time jobs, working over 102 hours each week. Working two full time jobs is a requirement if I am to provide for my family's medical insurance, food for my family to eat and a place for them to sleep.

I have faced so many challenges over the years. My goal is to return to college to further my education but I can't pursue that now because my family comes first. I would love to attend my son Gabriel's basketball games but I cannot because I am at work or exhausted from my 102-hour work week. It sounds crazy, but I do love my job. My son has made a promise to me that if I allow him to continue playing basketball he would keep his grades up. And his hope is to see me attend all his games. How can I when I have to work over 102 hours a week? My husband has been laid off most of the year. If I don't work these hours my family can't have a roof over our heads, or have the basics we need just to get by. Working these hours also jeopardize my health. I have developed type two diabetes as a consequence of my over working.

One of my challenges was when my employer decided to cut costs. They had to do so due to receiving no increases in funding from the state of Connecticut. Well that cost was my family medical. They cut my weekly hours of work from 35 to 32 intentionally to be able to get out of their contractual obligation to offer me family medical. Can they do that? Yes, they could. Not only did I lose my weekly earnings I lost my family medical benefits. I was the sole provider of them. My Employer did this to save the money because 99.9% of their funding comes directly from the state and state cut their funding. I was not alone in this cut. Many of other employees were affected by this hours layoff. The layoff of hours also affected the people with disabilities we care for. Because these hours are our hours of care for them.

In addition, at both of my jobs we have seen no raises in over 7 years. Current reimbursement rates don't keep up with the rising cost of care. They guarantee not only almost a decade of no raise, but likely additional wage cuts to caregivers like me who have been in the field for decades. Because our agencies haven't had any funding and have actually received cuts in recent years both of my jobs have dramatically cut the start rate down to \$12 an hour and the other down to \$13.68. In our roles as direct care givers we are responsible for pouring and passing medications, much like a nurse, executing nuanced behavioral programs, monitoring the use of people's personal monies, carrying out doctors' orders and keeping people safe and as independent as possible. We help people learn to walk, get a job, stay independent and learn to cope with their personal challenges. Cutting the wages has had the direct effect of creating higher turnover and almost guaranteeing new faces in the lives of those we care for weekly.

But rather than be supported in our care giving, we have also had to give up other benefits just to help our employers, and the State of Connecticut, balance their budgets. Every corner has been cut due to the lack of funding. There is nothing else to trim. I am desperately concerned that a budget with no increase, a budget with continued rescission cuts carried forward will mean further cuts. I believe it will mean the \$2.00 an hour wage cut my employers were both asking me to take in the last 2 years will become a reality for me, my co-workers and the people we care for. I am not alone in this. Between my two jobs alone, I am speaking about 1,200 workers directly affected by these very cuts. This will be devastating.

Please ensure that our agencies are reimbursed at a rate that allows them to cover the true cost of care, not just a uniform rate. We are thread bare, and worked to the bone. And the people we are caring for are not being best served by the high turnover these cuts are causing.

Thank you for listening.