

Good afternoon honorable committee members

My name is Alex P. Rencsko Jr. I am retired after a long career at Northeast Utilities, and an Executive Council member of the Naugatuck Valley Project ("NVP"). Living in Southbury, which has among the highest concentration of elderly population in the nation (me included) has raised my awareness of the problem of aging in Connecticut.

To better get a grip on this problem I have participated in the State of Connecticut's Allied Health Workforce Policy Board's ("AHWPB") meetings as a representative of the Naugatuck Valley Project, an organization concerned about the aging dilemma described below.

The Connecticut AHWPB is charged with finding ways to ensure that an adequately trained and capable home healthcare workforce is available in Connecticut to meet the ever-growing requirement of a rapidly aging population. Currently I am also representing NVP participating in a coalition of labor and religious congregations on a statewide basis to address some of the problems associated with Senior/Homecare Worker Justice.

NVP is faith-based organization consisting of religious congregations, unions, tenant organizations and small business affiliates. NVP's original purpose was to save jobs in the Naugatuck Valley when industrial concerns either closed or moved overseas. Our focus is still to save jobs in healthcare as well to assist ~~tenant~~ affordable housing cooperatives that NVP helped create to maintain and improve their development. Another major emphasis is to ensure that our aging population has acceptable home health care.

It is common knowledge that homecare workers (aka personal care attendants or PCA's) receive minimum wages and training, and little if any benefits. As a result the less than 50% retention for these employees is abysmal and results in an inconsistent and volatile level of care. As a result the majority of PCA's are young immigrant women with children and multiple minimum wage jobs in order to survive.

My exposure to these workers has showed a dedicated and caring workforce that would prefer to continue working in the homecare industry but economic realities are forcing them to leave. NVP is committed to improving these draconian working conditions for the betterment of the workers and for the delivery of consistent and appropriate level of care for the client.

This brings me to the issue of workmen's compensation for PCA's, a critical benefit that is virtually available to the entire Connecticut workforce, and rightly so since all employees should be protected from workplace accidents.

Connecticut was known for its blue laws, laws which may have had some benefit long ago but have not kept up with the changing times and are usually counterproductive. It happens that the legislature for whatever reasons decided back in the 70's that all individual that provide home services for fewer than 26 hours per week were excluded from protection under workmen's compensation coverage.

Why this exclusion was enacted is anyone's guess, but it clearly flies in the face of reason since it singles out the neediest of people and denies them a benefit they sorely need. Further it flies in the face of the goals of today's model of self-directed homecare services for seniors and people with physical or developmental disabilities.

- As a result most homecare workers providing care to DSS or DDS individuals are not covered for on the job injuries. With no insurance to pay medical bills the homecare worker is unable to

work and support themselves and their family. As noted above, Connecticut is deeply engaged in trying to solve the problem of meeting a growing aging population with an adequate healthcare workforce. This problem is a serious impediment to that effort.

- Clients that choose to self-direct their own care only have poor choices to make. They can pay for the workmen's compensation from their DSS waiver budget or their own wallet or they could split the hours among home healthcare workers to avoid the 26-hour rule, resulting in differing levels of care. This also puts them at risk of being sued for any personal injuries to the worker

It is important to note that homecare agencies are required to provide workmen's compensation. Only workers for self-directed clients are left unprotected.

The solution to this problem is to enact House Bill #687, an Act to provide workmen's compensation insurance for homecare workers employed by clients who receive state funds. It is important to note that the bill gives DAS, DDS and DSS the discretion to implement the most effective method.

The benefits of this legislation are threefold:

1. Homecare workers are ensured medical attention and support for workplace injuries,
2. Consumers need not choose between a full-time caregiver and cost,
3. Reduction in per-person costs through a group policy instead of individual ones. Consumers can then budget for service rather than insurance.

In further support of this bill, it is evident that Connecticut has not kept pace with the rest of the nation on this issue. State such as Massachusetts, Oregon, Illinois and California already provide this benefit. Again only workers who work in a particular home for less than 26 hours would benefit and they would not be classified as state employees because the state would be designated as the employer only for the purpose of providing workmen's compensation coverage.

Finally there is no cost to the worker and the cost to the state should be minimal due to the number of workers covered and consumers would benefit by no longer paying for more expensive individual coverage. For example individual coverage in Connecticut is just under \$1,000 versus \$250 for a group policy in Massachusetts.

Let me close by saying the Naugatuck Valley Project fully supports the passage of House Bill # 6878.

Thank you for your time.