

Labor & Public Employees Committee
Public Hearing - February 25, 2016

Arnold Nicholson
PO Box 2022
Manchester CT 06045

To the esteemed members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Arnold Nicholson and I have worked in many professions in my life: teacher, paralegal, marketing manager, certified nursing assistant, security guard, and homecare worker. I have been a homecare worker for the past 7 years, and homecare is my way of giving back and caring for those who can't care for themselves.

I am here today to ask for your support for Senate Bill #210, AN ACT CONCERNING WORKERS' COMPENSATION LIABILITY FOR INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING SERVICES FROM PERSONAL CARE ATTENDANTS.

Homecare workers love what we do; but what we do doesn't love us back. The absence of the most basic benefits like workers' compensation coverage shows a lack of respect for both caregivers and for the seniors we serve.

In order to continue and improve the quality of care for the clients we serve, it's necessary for home care workers to receive worker's compensation. Our work is very physical.

I have cared for two elderly gentlemen during my career as a homecare worker; one was a stroke survivor and the other was a brain cancer patient. I attended to their physical, emotional, and social needs. I washed them up in the morning; gave them showers, dressed them, brushed their teeth and combed their hair. It was my job to ambulate them -- move them and stand them up to keep them limber and avoid stiffness from immobility. I fed them their meals, sometimes by hand if they couldn't feed themselves. I accompanied them to their appointments and made sure they took their medications. I also made sure that they had the comforts inside their home that they desired to have: I took them for walks in their wheelchairs, or placed them in their favorite chairs to watch a favorite TV show.

At the end of the day, seeing that I brought satisfaction and a high quality of care into their lives was rewarding to me. When you care for someone day-in and day-out, there is a bond that begins to develop, they start to see you as one of their own.

This is honorable work that allows us to give our patients a high quality of care, but we're not getting to enjoy the same quality of life. The State's outdated worker's compensation law penalizes my consumer for hiring me for more than 25.75 hours per week. If I go above that hours limit, they are forced to pay for worker's compensation out of their own budget. My consumers are Medicaid recipients—it's just totally unaffordable. As a result, I work five jobs total, working two additional CNA jobs plus a job in security. I can easily 80 or 90 hours a week to make ends meet.

You have to figure out how to survive, but working those kinds of hours start to wear you down eventually. After so many hours at work, mental and physical fatigue starts to set in. When you get tired, it can hurt the quality of care you are able to provide.

If I get hurt, I'm on my own, completely without protection. It is a tremendous amount of financial stress knowing that one injury on the job could mean that I am out of work with no way to pay my bills or pay my rent. I'd be in big trouble.

There is a very high turnover level due to the low wages and lack of benefits. The homecare field is constantly losing good people because while we're providing a good quality of care and life for others, that is not being reciprocated for us. We, as homecare workers, have no choice but to constantly be on the hunt for a job that will better allow us to care for our families.

There is a better way forward for Connecticut. Our own Department of Labor says that the homecare field will have the highest growth of new jobs over the next 10 years than any other field. To decrease turnover in our field, we need to have basic benefits.

Workers' compensation is a start, and Senate Bill #210 will do just that. The choices we make around this demonstrate our values as a state. Our values should reflect the dignity, respect, and quality of life we all deserve.