Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. My name is Suzanne Clark, and I am Secretary-Treasurer of the Service Employees International Union District 1199 New England. Our union represents about 26,000 health care workers in Connecticut, both in the public and private sector. Our members are black, brown and white caregivers. They serve people in need of assistance daily, and they do some of the toughest work you can find within the borders of our state. At 1199 we are uniquely positioned to speak about the services provided to Connecticut residents because we represent workers that provide a variety of services in both the public and private sector.

Tonight and throughout the rest of the legislative session you will hear many proposals about how to deliver human services cheaper and more effectively in the private sector. We hear these privatization proposals every year. District 1199 knows that there is no magic formula in the private sector to provide these essential services at a lower cost than the state. The reason for the lower cost is plain and clear. Private providers pay workers less and offer less benefits. It is not uncommon to see a private agency caregiver work 80 to 100 hours a week. They live paycheck to paycheck, and are forced to make the tough choices of paying their electric bill or buying vital medication. Yet 100% of the money for both the public and private services is paid for by state funds.

Too often we are told to buy into the fallacy that in order for a private agency worker to succeed then a state worker must lose. Certain powerful elites claim that we can provide more private care services in Manchester if we close a state home in Meriden; we can give a private worker a raise in New Haven if we take away a state worker’s pension in New Britain. For once and for all let’s reject these false equivalences and acknowledge we are one of the richest states in the country. We can protect both our public and private workers, while providing quality care to the people who need their services. Let’s move forward and successfully provide quality care, but not at the expense of the workers that are providing them. Quality care cannot be delivered by demoralizing good working people.

The cost of providing care through private agencies is not lower. Ask workers and they will tell you the cost is very high. The cost is never seeing your kid’s soccer game because you’re forced to work over 80 hours a week. The cost is every night praying that you or no one in your family will get sick because you can no longer afford your health insurance premium that just increased 325%. The cost is working as hard as you possibly can and squeezing as many work hours out of your tired and broken body, but still not being able to pay your bills on time.

There hasn’t been proper funding in the private sector for years, while workers and agencies have had to take on higher levels of care as clients are transferred out of state homes into private agencies. This lack of adequate funding hurts both workers and clients. Now is the time to stop this madness. Our state’s solution to the budget deficit should not be turning working class taxpayers into low-wage earners and further drain our state resources when it comes to public assistance.

Thank you.