Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Nancy Minarsky and I have spent my entire career as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) at a large nursing home in Danielson.

Like many of my coworkers, I entered the healthcare field because I always wanted to take care of people. As caregivers, we grow relationships with our residents and learn to love them like we love our own family. Most people don’t know that the state staffing requirement for nursing homes is that every resident has to receive 1 hour and 24 minutes of care in every 24 hour period. Stop and think about that. To give you a better idea, the majority of my residents need help eating. It takes most residents about twenty minutes to eat. They all get three meals a day. Nearly all of our residents need assistance with toileting. Many are incontinent and wear briefs or pull-ups to avoid soiling themselves. Many residents need the assistance of two aides and a mechanical lift called a Hoyer to get into bed. It takes two experienced staff about 10 minutes to transfer someone with a Hoyer into their bed, remove their brief, clean them, dress them and move them back to their wheelchair. All of my residents need to be toileted or changed two or three times during my 8 hour shift. Others may need to be toileted five or six times in one shift. Bathing, eating, toileting, providing medication — that’s all part of that one hour and twenty four minutes of care.

The other day, I was taking care of a lady who is deep in dementia. I’ve worked on her wing for about four months and I’ve never heard her say a complete sentence. Others tell me it’s been years. She mumbles and sputters but doesn’t really put together words or an actual sentence. I’ve never seen any family member visiting her. She was in the dining room and suddenly out of nowhere she said “I want to go home”. Clear as a bell. She was alert just started crying. It was heartbreaking. I went to her and told her “I know honey, I’m sorry” and put my arm around her. She said it again. I tried to stay with her for a few minutes to calm her down. But then I had to rush away and attend to my other residents. If we had more staff – I could have stayed with her longer as she made her way out of the fog of dementia. It would have meant everything to her.

The problem with these staffing levels is that it means we’re rushing just to take care of resident’s basic needs. We don’t have enough time to pay attention to the person’s emotional needs, let alone our own basic needs as caregivers. As caregivers, we have not had a raise since 2015, meanwhile the cost of living in this state is rising. Our workload has increased two-fold and many of us don’t eat lunch or take breaks – times that are critical to our mental health as caregivers.

I would also like to use my time to speak as a family member. My 82-year-old mother has been a patient at Davis Place for a several years now. She didn’t ask for Alzheimer’s. She didn’t ask to be placed in a nursing home. My mother and all of our residents deserve quality care. They deserve to be acknowledged and to have someone care for their soul, not just their body. To look at their pictures, go down memory lane and actually listen and be present with them. You can’t put a price tag on that and I am asking you to help us care for residents like my mother.

Please increase funding for Nursing Homes so that we can address critical issues like staffing levels and wage increases for workers like me. Thank you for your time today.