



**SEIU**Healthcare®  
United for Quality Care

March 7, 2019  
Michelle Hart, Personal Care Attendant  
Before the Labor & Public  
Employees Committee

***In support of SB 2 and HB 5004: AN ACT INCREASING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE.***

Good Afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Michelle Hart and I'm a homecare worker from Baltic and a proud member of 1199. I got into homecare after taking care of my grandmother, who had Alzheimers and Dementia. I cared for her for 7 months before she passed away, fulfilling a promise I made to my grandfather to keep her at home under my care. Since then, I've cared for 4 other clients over the past 7 years. When I care for someone, I become attached to them and they become like family to me. I feel that God put me on this earth to be a homecare worker and take care of others with compassion and positivity.

Everyone who knows me can tell you that I'm extremely positive, even in the face of challenges, and I always have a smile on my face. But, throughout my life, there have been several times when the low wages have hurt me. When you make low wages, you have no cushion, so any accident can take a huge toll on you physically, financially and emotionally. Once, I sustained an injury that caused my lung to collapse. Because I didn't have paid leave or any savings and I was making less than \$13/hour, I had to undergo surgery to have my lung glued back to my chest wall and then go back to work the very next day because I couldn't afford to miss a day of pay. I worked through the pain for a long time because I had no other choice.

Then last fall, a disk in my back broke in half as a result of lifting a client. At that time, we as homecare workers didn't have access to workers comp insurance, either. I could barely walk or drive, much less care for my children, but I pushed myself to continue working for one of my clients throughout because I needed an income. However, I physically couldn't continue to work for the second client that requires being lifted. Without that second job, I had to reach out to Catholic Charities for help just to narrowly avoid eviction.

Today, I'm thankful that through my Union we won workers comp insurance and \$15.25 per hour that finally went into effect in January. I currently care for three different homecare clients to make a full time living, and I love what I do. Despite the progress we've made, tens of thousands of working families like mine are still making poverty level wages. No one should have to choose between working to stay afloat and navigating a crisis.

Having a \$15 minimum wage across the state is an important step toward helping working families like mine survive on a day to day basis. We need to make wages that allow us to live with dignity, take care of our families without crushing stress, and save a little for the unexpected. Please consider this testimony and vote yes for a \$15 minimum wage.