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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 Kay Wright and I'm a homecare worker from New Haven. I'm here to ask you to support the \$15 minimum wage bill.

I'm one of 9,500 homecare providers caring for those who can't live independently in Connecticut. Almost 90% of us are women, and I believe the majority of us are black and brown folks. Everyone's story is different, but in my case, I grew up seeing my mom help out an elderly neighbor who had no one to help her. I know my mom was never paid for it, but I was raised to see that that was simply the right thing to do. I got into homecare myself after I retired from nearly thirty years of service at the telephone company. In my case, I retired with a Union pension, but not everyone is so lucky. Today, I care for an elderly gentleman who is partially paralyzed from a stroke. I do it because I love it and after retirement I wanted to stay busy and give back in a way that I knew was valuable.

My consumer looks forward to me being there, but I also look forward to going there to care for him. In a typical day, the tasks I do for him sound simple but they're actually fundamental to him living independently. I help him take his blood sugar, get cleaned up, apply lotion to his skin, and get him dressed. I go grocery shopping, make him dinner, and pay his bills. He values his independence and I truly think he wouldn't survive if he didn't have it: I remember once I made his bed for him and then watched him remake to his liking. Caring for someone like him feels like a blessing both for him but also for me. Quite simply, caring for someone else gives me pleasure.

Through my union, District 1199, we fought to secure a \$15 minimum wage for homecare workers which went into effect last year. Even with the small number of hours I work, that extra money makes it a little bit easier to pay my bills. \$15 per hour is good and I'm thankful for it, but when I left the telephone company in 1996 I was making over \$15 already. What that tells me is that wages have not kept pace with the cost of living. Raising the state's minimum wage to \$15/hour is the first step in the right direction toward a living wage for Connecticut's residents.

In Connecticut, passing a \$15 minimum wage and Paid Family & Medical leave won't even give us anything extra; it simply moves us two small steps closer to a future where working families like mine, many of whom are black and brown, can survive. Even now, there are no room for emergencies. When something comes up – like a large car repair, or having to take time off without any paid leave – we're in a bind. It feels like we're always chasing a train on foot, struggling to catch up, but the train is always faster than us. Helping working families come a step or two closer to survival is the right and humane thing to do. Please support a \$15 minimum wage, and thank you for your time.