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Kim Ackerman
Direct Support Staff, Whole Life
SEIU 1199 NE
Before the Labor And
Public Employees Committee

In Support of SB 1002: AN ACT CONCERNING LABOR ISSUES RELATED TO COVID-19, PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND OTHER STAFFING MATTERS and In Support of HB 6595: AN ACT CONCERNING LABOR MATTERS RELATED TO COVID-19, PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND OTHER STAFFING ISSUES

Good Morning Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Kim Ackerman and I live in Canton, Connecticut. I am a Direct Support Staff member at Whole Life and have worked in healthcare for over twenty-five years. I come before you today in support of SB 1002 and HB 6595.

I have been working at the Mullen Hill Whole Life location for 3 years but have worked in group homes for the last 8 years. In my role as a Direct Support Staff member, I work very closely with highly behavioral individuals. Some of these individuals do not have families and so we as the staff become their family. Being able to build these relationships with our individuals is one of the most fulfilling parts of my job.

That said, my job is also incredibly challenging. Not everyone could do this job. Working with highly behavioral individuals can sometimes be difficult. On top of that, my coworkers and I deal with low staffing, low wages, and long hours. This was before the pandemic.

The pandemic amplified existing problems, while creating new ones. We didn't have PPE for a while. Even now we often have to borrow from other houses because our managers don't provide an adequate supply of masks and gloves. In addition, some of have latex allergies, but I have to ask for non-latex gloves to be ordered because they won't do so otherwise. I buy and bring my own non-latex gloves and do not get reimbursed for it.

I tested positive for Covid-19 on Christmas Eve. I believe I must have contracted Covid from someone at work because I don't go anywhere else. We were given 80 hours of Covid Leave to cover for the two weeks that I was out of work. If we go over the 80 hours we are forced to use up your three days of personal time and whatever sick and vacation time (if any) that we have accrued. If we are sick any longer than that, or if we get sick again, you have to get permission from management to take any further time off. It's not certain to be granted. If you are not given permission you have to come into work even if you are sick or you will get written up. If

you are lucky enough to be able to granted extra time off, it will be unpaid. We are not given another 80 hours if we get sick again.

My employers won't even be giving Covid Leave after March 31st. If anyone gets Covid after March 31, they will only have their personal, sick, and vacation time to fall back on. This places newer employees in a tough position since they have not been employed long enough to have earned much sick time or vacation time. This is very unfair. I don't think it's right for them to stop giving Covid Leave after March.

We're called "heroes" and "essential" workers. We take care of other people. Yet so little regard is given for our own health and well-being. We deserve better. Please pass SB 1002 and HB 6595.

Thank you for your time.