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United for Quality Care

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Arden House
SEIU District 1199 New England
Before the Public Health Committee

In Support of SB 1030 AN ACT CONCERNING LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES With Changes.

Good afternoon Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Mary Cimino, I live in Wallingford, CT, and I have worked at the Arden House nursing home in Hamden as a CAN for 39 years. I come before you today to testify in support of SB 1030 with changes.

I love my job because I have always loved taking care of people. Our residents have interesting stories to tell and wisdom to share; I really enjoy working with them. It makes me and my team feel proud and accomplished to see someone we've been caring for go home in better shape than when they arrived. The people I work with have almost as much longevity as I. We have grown together as have our families and our residents. We have reach milestones that most people never obtain with their own families. As cliché as it sounds, we have lived, loved, and laughed together.

While I love the work I do, there are certainly major challenges we must contend with on a daily basis. Short staffing, inadequate PPE supply, and a lack of quality training are a few issues my home deals with. These were problematic before the pandemic, they became far worse because of the pandemic though.

Short staffing results in staff frantically trying to get all of their responsibilities done, while also ensuring residents are receiving quality care. We are often given unrealistic workloads by management because of this short staffing. When you have one person trying to do the work that would typically require multiple staff, the quality of care you can provide takes a hit. Furthermore, the staff that are working become exhausted, which hurts moral and further reduces our ability to keep up with the demanding work load.

Without an adequate supply PPE, caregivers were forced to reuse single use PPE, or resort to homemade PPE. Neither of these outcomes is acceptable, especially when we're trying to prevent your residents and coworkers from contracting a deadly virus. None the less we continued to do our jobs under this circumstance, and because of it we buried our residents and coworkers, our friends and family.

It wasn't just the PPE supply that was inadequate either. We weren't given truly comprehensive infection control education and training. We were flying by the seat of our pants, and any instruction that was given was not offered in a way that was efficient for all our staff. We need bilingual infection control training.

These issues and more would be addressed by SB 1030. Through this bill staffing standard would be raised; homes would be required to keep a 3 month PPE stockpile, although I think it should be a 6 month stockpile; and homes would be required to give comprehensive infection control education and training. All of these proposals would not only improve working conditions for the staff but the care residents receive.

I would add that the bill lacks any strong enforcement mechanisms, which is concerning to me. Nursing home operators cannot be relied upon to do the right thing simply because it is the right thing. Financial penalties or other enforcement mechanisms should be added to the bill to ensure homes comply.

With all of that said I am encouraged to see this bill being debated, and believe many of the proposals in this bill would greatly improve the work standards experienced by workers as well as the care we are able to give our residents. Please pass SB 1030 with the changes I've mentioned.

Thank you for your time.