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TOPIC: Long-Term Services & Supports***

My name is Robin Gilchrist and I am a home care worker - also known as a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) -- from Bridgeport. Thank you for letting me contribute my story to the White House Conference on Aging. My personal experience helps to show the significant problems in home care -- problems that need to be improved if we are going to provide good-quality long-term services and supports to our seniors.

As home care workers being in the home setting, we become not only the caregiver. We also become the janitor, the cook, the physical therapist, the social worker, the handyman (or woman), the friend and at times the only person they see for months. We wear all these caps in their home, yet we are the only workers who receive no benefits, no worker's compensation coverage, and and less than \$15 an hour in pay.

I love helping people, so I became a home care worker so I can help those who cannot help themselves with their personal care, with their activities of daily living, with social integration and to provide companionship. That's why it is so upsetting that no one is there to help us when we are hurt on the job.

For example, as a personal care attendant (PCA), I helped my consumer get in and out of the bed. My consumer did not have a hydraulic Hoyer lift in her home, so I had to carry her with no support. I knew that my consumer needed me and did not have the money to get a Hoyer lift. The pain from lifting her in and out of bed was getting worse, but I continued working injured because I truly care for this woman and if I did not show up to work no one would care for her.

One day the pain was so intense that I had go to the emergency room. Right then and there the doctors determined I needed surgery on both my hands and my shoulders. That meant that I could not work for weeks. The Connecticut DSS waiver programs for home care does not provide workers

compensation coverage (state statute exempts in-home workers who work less than 27 hour/week in one home), so I was left with no income and with my medical bills piling up. I had to rely on unemployment benefits, food stamps, going to the food pantry and state-provided health care. My consumer had no choice but to hire a new, unfamiliar PCA to care for her while I was injured, so I permanently lost my job - all because I was injured on the job.

To this day, I still cannot carry anything that weights more than 5 pounds. This has limited me in lifting my fist born grandbaby, and I am still undergoing therapy for my shoulders.

Home care is a wonderful idea to allow seniors to stay at home as long as possible. But our home care system today is not treating homecare workers or the seniors we take care of fairly, and that hurts the quality of care all around. One of my desires as a homecare worker is not only to be paid no less than \$15 an hour and basic benefits, but also to know that elderly and the disabled that we take care off will receive the best care in our USA.

Thank you

Robin Gilchrist