

**Testimony for Tyreika Tate; Dietary Dept, Cook
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A respected workforce -- is a reliable workforce.

But our nursing home workers are overworked and underpaid.

We are a workforce that is exhausted and paid poverty level wages.

We are watching a short-staffing crisis right before our eyes and our nursing home workforce is becoming hollowed out.

Directly paying frontline workers fair and living wages, and directing more resources to the bedside to care for our residents is the immediate solution to address our staffing crisis.

That's why I'm thankful to speak to today and appreciate **Senator Fontana** for organizing this important policy hearing, and for all the lawmakers in attendance.

My name is Tyreika Tate, and I have worked at my nursing home, Walnut Creek Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center in Erie with the Dietary Department for 36 years.

Yes, you heard that right, 36 years.

I work as a cook in the dietary department making meals for 108 residents, and other staff members. It is huge responsibility that often becomes overwhelming.

Because our CNAs, LPNs, and support staff are stretched so thin a single incident with one of our residents can throw off our entire eating and service schedule, which creates chaos within our facility.

There is simply no slack in the system.

Let me emphasize that we are talking about our residents, seniors and those who are often vulnerable, who need our care and attention.

Caregiving is a team sport.

But when workers feel like we are so disrespected, and simply don't earn enough money to stay on the job, and can find other less stressful work - then you understand the seeds of this short-staffing crisis.

I've been in this industry for decades and although staffing has always been bad -- the lights are blinking red. Our lawmakers must take action.

My fear - and I hope yours too -- is a continued and sustained reduction of our nursing home workers without any ability to replace us.

And from the point of view of a caregiver, right now, why would someone sign up?

Nursing home workers are being asked to do the hardest job in America where we are short-staffed, given poverty-level pay, our jobs are physically and emotionally demanding, and then we often feel disrespected by managers and nursing home owners.

We are the ones blamed -- even though we're the ones without the resources to do our jobs and give our residents the care they deserve.

The solution is clear.

It is urgent that our state lawmakers invest more Medicaid funding - to the tune of \$350 million dollars which would be matched by the federal government - to provide ALL nursing home workers a higher wage.

Retaining skilled, experienced, and dedicated caregivers, like me and my co-workers -- across all job titles -- is the single best way to protect our residents and improve our quality care.

Any new Medicaid funding **MUST** go directly to our essential workers -- and not used in any way for a bailout to the nursing home industry, for executive bonuses, or financial schemes that rewards owners instead of caregivers.

Other states have figured this out - which other speakers have addressed.

Pennsylvania can raise wages for nursing workers -- and we **MUST** do so.

I have the honor of knowing several co-workers of mine who have also served at Walnut Creek for over three decades.

And at least three of my co-workers who work as CNAs have asked to be reassigned to other departments, even taking a pay cut, simply because the short-staffing and overbearing workload was too much. .

Our poverty-level pay is what is fueling this downward spiral.

Think of your own family members: would any one of you want your family member to be placed in a facility where there is simply not enough workers to attend to their care? Of course not.

We simply can't keep losing good workers and not think this won't have a profound negative impact on our residents.

I am proud to stand with my SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania Union when we call upon everyone - especially the state legislature - to take action.

It is vital that our lawmakers:

Respect us. Protect us. And yes, Pay Us!

Thank you.