



NEW YORK CARING MAJORITY
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Testimony before the Joint Legislative Hearing **Workforce Development Budget**

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Good afternoon. My name is Karla Lawrence and I am a home care worker. I am a proud member of SEIU 1199 as well as the National Domestic Workers Alliance. I am here today testifying on behalf of the New York Caring Majority.

My organization is home to the growing care and cleaning workforce that goes to work in homes, supporting America's families. We are the leading voice for dignity and fairness for the millions of domestic workers in the United States, most of whom are women and people of color. We are powered by over 60 affiliate organizations--plus robust local chapters--of over 20,000 nannies, housekeepers, and caregivers in 36 cities and 17 states. We work with a broad range of groups and individuals to change how we value care, women, families, and our communities.

Our home care worker organizing builds the voice and leadership of one of the fastest growing workforces in the country. By providing crucial supports and services, home care workers ensure that seniors and people with disabilities can live independently in their own homes. Despite our important work, across the country, home care workers don't make enough to feed our own families; face high rates of injury on the job; and lack healthcare and paid leave. We believe that home care workers must be the leaders who redefine this work and make these jobs high-quality ones. We also respect and collaborate with the families and individuals who employ home care workers, and see our struggles as deeply connected. That's what brings me here today.

My story is typical of our members. I grew up in Jamaica, as one of 4 siblings. Like so many girls and young women, I grew up caring for my siblings and for the aging members of my family and community. That's simply what we did. I took care of my grandmother in Jamaica for several years, and I look back on our relationship with great love and pride. Even when others sometimes didn't understand her needs, she and I were always very close and I always felt tuned in to her needs for dignity and care. I also was a caregiver for my father in the final months of his life after he suffered a series of heart attacks. I'm proud that he was able to pass away peacefully and with dignity.

I immigrated to New York in 1991 when I was 16 years old. I finished high school, and when it came time to begin pursuing work, I chose home care. I remembered how it felt to care for my



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beloved grandmother back home, and realized that I had a passion for this work. I signed up for a course and became a home attendant right out of high school. With each client that I took care of, my passion for caregiving grew. I love meeting people's needs. I love making my clients smile and laugh. I love making them feel loved and ensuring that they don't feel left out of society. What work could be more precious and valuable than that?

I worked for eight years as a home attendant before deciding that I was ready to take the next step in the career ladder. I went back for more training to become a CNA, enabling me to perform more caregiving duties than before. Today I'm proud to share that I continue to climb the career ladder and am going to back to school for nursing. I have a passion for learning and a passion for caring. Most home care workers do!

As many of you know, our state is facing a crisis-level shortage of home care workers. As a result, seniors face delayed discharge from hospitals or require costlier institutionalization rather than their preferred and often less-expensive services at home. An immediate investment to recruit and retain home care workers will save local tax-payers from paying a higher Medicaid bill. But without action from the state, both the Medicaid and non-Medicaid populations remain underserved. Regardless of a person's income, there simply isn't a large enough workforce made up of dedicated individuals like myself. Low-wages and challenging working conditions make it almost impossible to be a home care worker. Being a member of 1199 means I'm better off than most home care workers but we are still undervalued.

Having a home care worker like me can prevent unnecessary falls and hospitalizations, not to mention ensuring that seniors are eating well and taking their medication on time. Home care workers are vital in preventing these costly and unnecessary setbacks. I understand we're facing a big deficit here in New York, and that it might seem impossible to find additional money to pay for home care in this moment. But the long-term costs to the system are far greater. What better preventive care than home care? What better defensive team than home care workers?!

Over the years, most of my clients have received services through Medicaid, though some pay out of pocket or get EISEP. I've lost count of how many clients of mine were in need of more hours of care than were allotted. Some were receiving 4 hours but they should have been getting 6-8 hours. Some were approved for 12 hours but they really needed round the clock care. For those seniors who have family members around, the family steps in for those additional hours. But for the ones without family, they're in real trouble. They're at greater risk for falls when they get out of bed or need to go to the bathroom. Safety is a big issue. One fall could lead to a broken bone or an unnecessary trip to the hospital. One injury begets another, and the path to recovery becomes longer and more costly.



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My clients have worked all their lives and contributed so much to society. Why, in their hour of need, would we not do whatever it takes to give them the best? This is America. This is New York. Let's do right by our elders and pass a budget in 2018 that we can be proud of. A more caring budget. An age-friendly budget that invests in the home care workforce.

We applaud Governor Cuomo's inclusion of workforce development as a priority for the 2018 budget. I urge the legislature to ensure that home care is included in our state's workforce development agenda. It's the fastest growing occupational sector, and the one in which women (especially women of color) are overrepresented. #TimesUp on a workforce development agenda that does not prioritize the needs of women workers and our families. I urge you to fund the Home Care Jobs Innovation Fund, which Allison will discuss further in her testimony.

Thank you for hearing my testimony here today. The New York Caring Majority looks forward to working with you in the weeks and months ahead to do right by the millions of New York seniors, family caregivers, people with disabilities, and home care workers. When we join forces, we are truly the Caring Majority.

