

My name is Kendra Scalia. I am submitting this written testimony to the NYS Legislature Health and Medicaid Budget Hearing as a member of Hand In Hand: The Domestic Employer's Network. I am also a disabled woman and healthcare policy analyst. Seniors and people with disabilities like myself are struggling to find home care workers because the job pays under \$13 an hour in most of New York State. [A new report by the CUNY School for Labor and Urban Studies](#) found that over the next decade, a projected 981,900 openings will need to be filled statewide for home health aides and personal care aides

I receive consumer directed personal assistance (CDPA) home care services, where I am the direct employer and responsible to hire, schedule, train and supervise my employees but they are paid through Medicaid. I'm assessed to receive 16 hours per day of home care but due to COVID and the long-term workforce shortage crisis, I can only staff 6-10 hours per day. I have been in a perpetual hiring process for more than 5 years.

One week into the COVID lockdown, my primary personal assistant (PA) contracted the virus from her mother, a nursing home worker who contracted it through her job. My PA has been unable to return to work because the virus has caused long-term complications for her immediate family members and she is now their primary caregiver. Just one week after my first PA contracted the virus, a second PA fell ill. While her experience was more typical and she recovered quickly, her childcare center closed and is now permanently shut down as many small businesses did not make it through the pandemic. She wants to return to work. I want her to return to work. Due to the low wages, she was unable to have savings and is now trapped, unable to afford competitive private child care prices. Neither of my PAs received sick pay or other financial assistance to assist them through their own illnesses. A third PA left the position with me at the beginning to autumn 2020 for a better paying job - in a nursing home.

I now have just one personal assistant that works 7 days a week. He isn't provided much over-time pay even though he regularly works 60-80 hours per week depending on my needs. He has worked with me for 6.5 years. He has never taken a day off. He is always the person to step in and fill a shift when another worker calls out. And yet, he's never received a raise (outside of state minimum wage increases) and he doesn't have health insurance of his own.

Not being able to fill all of the shifts needed to complete my care means I'm unable to receive assistance with all of my needs. Some days I have help to eat and toilet just once per day; I cannot shower as frequently as I would like; and I must often skip therapies designed to maintain my health. While this issue has been ongoing long before COVID, the pandemic has made recruiting and retaining PAs more challenging. Since September 2020, I've had nearly 80 telephone interviews with applicants interested in this job. Most of them went well and were qualified workers I wanted to hire. But at the end of our conversations they all ask how much this position pays. When I tell them this is a minimum wage job at \$12.50 per hour, every single person apologizes and withdraws their application. People simply cannot afford to accept a job that does not sustain their basic cost of living.

My current home care worker is exhausted and frustrated, but still dedicated to supporting me. I am exhausted and frustrated, as all. But most of all I live in constant fear that should something happen to my personal assistant or should he find a better paying job, my literal independence and freedom will be taken from me overnight. I don't know when this situation will improve and I have no other resources to lean on should my situation worsen.

The solution, however, is simple. We need home care jobs to be recognized and treated as quality, dignified jobs with family-sustaining wages. That's why I urge you to support the Fair Pay for Home Care Act. The Fair Pay for Home Care Act would raise home care wages to 150% of minimum wage - on average this would go from \$22,000 to \$35,000 a year. As New York faces widespread unemployment, the Act would bring 200,000 new home care workers into the field over the next decade and additionally create 180,000 jobs in other sectors and industries via increased spending and economic activity. If the state starts paying home care workers a living wage, these jobs will be filled immediately — because of the high demand.

We need to ensure home care jobs never become minimum wage jobs again. Please support the Fair Pay for Home Care Act today.