

**New York State Legislative Hearing on Health
February 25, 2021**

**Assemblyman Richard Gottfried, Chair, Committee on Health
Senator Gustavo Rivera, Chair, Committee on Health**

New York Caring Majority:

My name is Bobbie Sackman. I am a Campaign Leader with the NY Caring Majority/Jews for Racial & Economic Justice. I have worked on issues impacting older adults for 40 years including 28 years as the Director of Public Policy with LiveOn NY, the central organization in NYC doing advocacy for home and community-based services for older New Yorkers. I speak today as an advocate and an older New Yorker.

The NY Caring Majority is comprised of older adults, people with disabilities, home care workers and family caregivers working to address the injustices within our long term care system. The Caring Majority's central focus is the Fair Pay for Home Care Act.

Care Work Is Essential:

Care work is essential for older adults and New Yorkers with disabilities to live and age safely and with dignity in their homes and communities. As New York's aging population grows and nursing homes prove dangerous for older adults during the COVID pandemic, home care workers are in high demand. During the COVID pandemic, a light has been shined on the centrality of the availability of affordable universal home care in New York to building the infrastructure for a humane, effective long term care system. The Fair Wages 4 Home Care Act lays the foundation for developing a caring economy with good paying jobs and quality care. Fair pay for home care workers is the momentum we need to turn an outmoded ship around and deliver home care to New Yorkers today.

Over 500,000 families use home care in the state — and that number will only grow as our state continues to age. [HCA]

Older adults, people with disabilities and family caregivers are struggling to find home care workers, because the job pays under \$13 an hour in most of New York

State. The average income is only \$18,600. I began my journey advocating for services and addressing ageism literally 50 years ago because my grandmother was placed in a nursing home. She died within 6 months, bitter, and my mother and uncle were torn apart from the experience. This was in 1970 and Medicaid home care didn't exist. My family didn't have the option. I understand the importance of home care – it's in my DNA. I want to see the Fair Pay 4 Home Care Act become a reality.

The home care sector cannot meet the rising demand due to low pay. As a result of low wages, 45% of the state's direct care workers live in or near poverty. [PHI] Because of the low pay, home care workers are leaving the workforce in droves right when we need them most — forcing many older New Yorkers to live in dangerous nursing homes instead of receiving care at home. As we speak, 24% of New York's home care consumers are unable to access services at all.

And 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.

According to AARP, there are 2.5 million family caregivers in NY state providing \$31 billion worth of free care to elderly parents, spouses and other loved ones. It has been acknowledged that the best long term care insurance is having a daughter or daughter-in-law. Clearly, the majority of this free care is being provided by women. Likewise, home care workers are predominantly women of color and immigrants.

Fair pay for home care and caregiving responsibilities impact people of color and immigrant families unequally. Latino family caregivers spend 44% of their income on average and African American family caregivers 34% for caregiving costs such as supplies, aides and home modifications vs. 14% of income by Whites. Nearly 40% Latino begin caregiving before age 35, while fewer than 20% of Whites do, resulting in more stress at the workplace and reduced future retirement earnings. 38% of Latino caregivers and 34% of both African American and Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) caregivers are in the "sandwich generation," caring for both their children and their parents, vs. 24% of Whites. Fair pay for home care workers impacts families across generations.

(NY AARP, Jan 2020, Disrupting Racial and Ethnic Disparities, section on caregiving).

Fair Pay for Home Care Act: Good for NY's Economy. Good for New Yorkers' Care:

Testifying with me today are millions of older New Yorkers, PWD, home care workers and family caregivers. We are, indeed, a caring majority. We all 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.

Economic generation: CUNY's School for Labor and Urban Studies new report found that The Act would generate \$5.4 billion for the state economy through new income and sales tax revenue, economic spillover, and reductions in Medicaid and social assistance.

Job creation during COVID: 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.

Jobs for women & POC: The Act will overwhelmingly improve existing jobs and create new jobs for women and people of color: currently, New York's care sector is 91% female and 77% people of color. As the country and state wrestle with historic racial injustice, along with the disproportionate impact of COVID on communities of color, Fair Pay for Home Care is an investment in equity, and lifting up a historically underpaid workforce.

Safe nursing home alternative during COVID and beyond: The Act will make older adults and people with disabilities safer. Research has found that recovering COVID patients have fared far better after discharge to home care, as opposed to nursing homes. One New York study found that persisting COVID symptoms and functional dependence that were common at the time of home health care admission improved for most patients. [VNSNY] COVID symptoms and

functional dependence that were common at the time of home health care admission improved for most patients.

As New York faces an economic recession and a global pandemic, we need to create new jobs, keep New Yorkers safe and stave off widespread unemployment. If the state starts paying home care workers a living wage, these jobs will be filled immediately — because of the high demand. There are solutions. What is needed is the political and social will to make New York a national leader in building a care economy for its residents a reality.

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