

**Testimony of Phyllis Arnold before the 2021 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Health
February 25, 2021**

My name is Phyllis Arnold. I am a member of the New York Caring Majority, a movement of seniors, people with disabilities, home care workers, and family caregivers from across the state fighting for universal health care, universal home care and dignified care jobs. I submit this testimony to urge support for the Fair Pay for Home Care Act (the “Act”), which would raise home care wages to 150% of regional minimum wage. In committing funds for this purpose, the state can both recognize the critical role home and community based care plays in the lives of older adults and New Yorkers with disabilities *and* make an investment in the home care workforce that holds the promise of helping fuel the State’s economic recovery.

It is the exceptional person or family that doesn’t have a care story. Mine was with my dad, who has been gone now for just over eight years. I live in NYC. He did not, and when he developed dementia in his 90’s, no one in the family realized it until he was quite far along. I had just started a small business, but that quickly fell by the wayside, as I had to quit work to figure out how to get and pay for services for my dad from a distance. I could not believe how hard it was to find – and to pay for – home care. It was a nightmare for both him and me. When he passed, it was a relief to me for all the wrong reasons.

Care work is ubiquitous and it is absolutely essential for older adults and those with disabilities to live and age safely and with dignity in their homes and communities. Even so, demand for care workers far outstrips supply and is expected to soar as the state’s population ages. More than 500,000 families use home care in the state, yet more than 24% of home care patients cannot get services due to labor shortages. *Home Care Association of New York State, State of the Industry 2019*, February 2019. A CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies report estimates that close to 1,000,000 job positions will need to be filled to meet the demand for aides over the ten-year period 2018-2028. *The Case for Public Investment in Higher Pay for New York State Home Care Workers*, Executive Summary.

It’s not hard to see why. The median annual salary for home care workers in the state is just over \$19,000. Because wages and earnings are so low, 57% of the home care workforce relies on public assistance. *PHI, New York’s Direct Care Workforce*, June 29, 2020 (*PHI*). This is indefensible.

The Fair Pay for Home Care Act promises a new direction. An increase of 150% of minimum wage would bring home care worker median annual earnings to over \$28,000 a year. Moreover, CUNY estimates that it would produce at least \$5.4 billion for the state’s economy by generating new income and sales tax monies, reducing Medicaid and social assistance, and creating economic spillover. At a moment of economic distress, it will bring new home care workers into the field and

create thousands of additional jobs in other sectors and industries attributable to increased spending and economic activity.

Indeed, the Act will improve existing jobs and create new jobs for women and people of color. New York's care sector is 91% female and 77% people of color. *PHI*. As we wrestle with historic structural racial injustice, particularly in light of the disproportionate impact of COVID on communities of color, the Act reflects an investment in equity and lifts up a historically underpaid workforce.

Investment can transform home care jobs into high-quality, family-sustaining jobs that will strengthen communities by lifting people out of poverty while creating a care infrastructure that allows New Yorkers to live and age with dignity in their own homes and communities. Passing the Fair Pay for Home Care Act is an important step. I urge your support.

Thank you.