

Thank you, Chairwoman Kruger, Chairman Rivera, Chairwoman Palin, and the rest of the budget and health committees for holding this hearing. I am Connor Shaw, and I am here on behalf of the 40,000 Home Healthcare Workers of America members, the national union representing more homecare aides than any other union in New York State.

Being a homecare aide is a demanding job. We have brought many HHWA members to your offices to share their stories and provide a glimpse into the grueling work they endure daily as they provide compassionate care to the most vulnerable within our State. Home care is the only viable long-term solution for New York's aging population, which continues to grow exponentially. Simply put, there is NO other viable alternative that New York's nursing home, hospital, and hospice care system can provide to meet NY State's care demands.

Given the surge in demand, it is baffling to HHWA, as well as other experts in the home healthcare space, that last year, funding was cut from the wage parity program. As you well know, wage parity funds critical benefits that aides receive to supplement their wages. As I am sure you know, the home healthcare industry faces a 100,000 aide shortage in New York. Pulling funding from wage parity will force employers to eliminate essential benefits, which will only serve to exacerbate the ongoing shortage. Home healthcare agencies struggle with recruitment and retention now. Aides simply cannot afford to live in one of the most expensive cities in the country with such a low compensation program, and many have opted to work retail and hospitality jobs that are far less demanding. Robbing Peter to pay Paul by requiring home health aides to pay for their raise by giving up their benefits is not a solution and will not be tolerated by the home healthcare workforce.

Ultimately, it's New York's most vulnerable that will pay the price. New York State has a responsibility to ensure that its elderly and infirm receive the care they so desperately need. Since October of 2023, when wage parity was cut, home healthcare agencies have been forced to cut essential benefits. For example, a HHWA employer is now forced to eliminate a critical afterschool program offering childcare and tutoring it provided its workforce that had reduced the agency's turnover rate from roughly 76% in the first 180 days to below 35%! Furthermore, our agencies that provide a commuter allowance for their workforce are cutting this benefit functionally, ending elder care in those areas as most home care aides rely on the public transit to get to their client's home.

The State can prevent the collapse the home healthcare industry which is the most cost-effective means of care is by properly funding and expanding the Quality Incentive Vital Access Program (QIVAPP). Homecare agencies that meet certain criteria receive a higher reimbursement rate to provide a higher level of benefits to their aides. The QIVAPP program also requires a higher level of training for aides, which means better outcomes for patients. It keeps patients out of New York hospitals, which saves New York tens of millions of dollars. QIVAPP also requires agencies that receive the funding to offer a higher level of medical insurance to their aides, which would reduce their reliance on Medicaid and save the State hundreds of millions in revenue.

Currently, Qivapp is only available to a select few. There are over a thousand home healthcare agencies in New York State, and only 69 have access to this critical program. This is because the State closed access to this program in 2016 and has refused to accept any new applicants. This must be reversed immediately, and the program must be opened to all who qualify.

QIVAPP is a smart program that can accomplish the State's objectives within the homecare industry. While requiring an upfront investment to expand the program, it saves New York's Department of Health hundreds of millions in the long run. QIVAPP allows employers to offer competitive wages and benefits which bolsters recruitment and retention in an industry with notoriously high turnover rates. I am calling on New York's elected officials to prevent the collapse of a critical industry that serves New York's most vulnerable by properly funding and opening this program now.

Thank You