

Glenda Faatoafe
4811 19th Avenue SE
Lacey, WA 98503

Home Care Worker, Korean Women's Association

Good morning.

My name is Glenda Faatoafe. I've been a home care worker providing assistance for seniors and people with disabilities for the last 11 years. In 2005, I became one of the 400,000 home care workers united in SEIU Healthcare, the largest health care union in the country.

I've traveled here today from Lacey, Wash., to talk to you about the value of home care, and the important work I do assisting others. For almost two years, I've been providing care for a 47-year-old man named Zebty Jally who is married and has six children, and is a quadriplegic.

Each day, I arrive at his home, review the night log, we begin his daily routine. It starts with helping him wash his face and relieve his bowel and bladder, including an internal catheter. I prepare and assist him in eating breakfast, and then his wife, Jiji, and I prepare to shower Zebty, which requires a two-man lift and transfer of his 100-pound body four separate times just to assist getting into the shower. After transferring him back to bed, we rub him down with cream, check for "hot spots" and bed sores, do over an hour's worth of range-of-motion exercises, and assist him in getting dressed for the day.

Every two hours, I need to reposition Zebty's body and check his blood pressure. If it reaches a dangerous level, either high or low, I must quickly assess what might be causing the spike and take action to regulate it. It requires fast thinking and an intimate knowledge of Zebty's unique needs. It's worth noting that it is because I've assisted him for almost two years and have a thorough understanding of his medical situation that I can deliver such vital, quality care.

Unfortunately, that kind of close relationship and continuity is rare. Turnover among caregivers is very high because of low wages and a lack of benefits. So, many clients are faced with training and learning to trust workers over and over again, as workers cycle through on a regular basis.

I love the work that I do. I have become very close with Zebty, Jiji, and their kids. They treat me like a member of their family, and the kids even gave me a Mother's Day card last month. It really touched my heart and reminded me how important home care work is.

But home care work is not easy. It's often a physically and emotionally demanding job, requiring not just lifting and transferring but compassion, love, and patience—for the client and their family. It's not a punch-in, punch-out job. If someone needs additional assistance, caregivers provide it—and are often not compensated. So, we work more hours than we're paid. It's a job with few benefits, like sick or vacation time. Many of us have no health insurance. I make \$10.12 an hour—but only thanks to the collaborative effort of my fellow union members during bargaining. The average worker makes around \$8 an hour.

In my family, we've made big sacrifices. On such a meager salary, we could afford to send only one of our three children to college. We don't take vacations. We don't drive new cars. Home care workers provide the important care that allows people to live independently, but we struggle to make ends meet and often are forced to leave the field for better jobs.

Both clients and workers struggle with poor backup systems, since recruiting and retaining reliable workers is so difficult. If I can't make it one day, it's almost impossible to find backup. There are not enough caregivers who are trained effectively to fill my shoes.

Without my assistance, Zebty would have a limited life. He would not be able to be there every day to watch his six children grow or participate in the significant events in their lives, like seeing his second grader in a recent school play. He would be in a nursing home and not be around to be a dad and make decisions for his family.

Like a lot of Americans, he worked hard and enjoyed spending time with his wife and kids, but then a terrible car accident almost two years ago left him paralyzed and unable to provide for his family.

Before his accident, Zebty had a good job with health care benefits and a 401(K). He had been able to start saving for retirement. When he became paralyzed and needed medical assistance, he had to spend all of his savings, leaving Medicaid as the only option left for him to get the personal care assistance he needs. And he is fortunate to live in a state with a Medicaid program that covers these in-home services. Many seniors and people with disabilities have to live in a nursing home because their state's program doesn't cover sufficient home and community-based services.

Because he fears losing his eligibility for these critical services, his family has to remain poor. His wife had worked as a child care provider, but because they need to stay poor to maintain his eligibility, and because she needed to be on call to provide backup care due to high turnover on the evening shift, she limited her hours and eventually stopped working altogether. They're on a tight budget and the loss of any one support would throw their family into crisis.

Medicaid-funded home and community-based services provide the cost-effective assistance seniors and people with disabilities need to live at home. But I don't think it should be the only reasonable way to access these services. People should not have to enter and remain in poverty to get this needed assistance.

Whether you're young or old, one day you may need long term care—and the choice to live at home without spending down into poverty should be available to everyone in America. We need to expand the choices for this growing population who need in-home care. Congress should take steps to ensure people have a range of options when it comes to community supports and services. It would be a great idea to create an affordable insurance program that enables people to prepare for the likelihood of becoming disabled, especially as they age.

This kind of program would provide additional resources and help ensure a stable, professional workforce is available. If we do not improve wages and provide basic benefits like health

insurance, we will never have a stable, professional workforce of dedicated caregivers to provide the quality care we can count on.

The recent Supreme Court decision to permit home care agencies to continue to deny payment of the minimum wage and overtime to home care workers devalues our work and does little to encourage workers like me to join this workforce and to stay in it.

I'm lucky that Washington state has such a strong minimum wage law that ensures that home care workers in Washington are protected. But Congress needs to take action to protect all home care workers by amending the Fair Labor Standards Act.

As the baby boomer generation ages, thousands of caregivers like me are going to be needed to provide the one-on-one, personal care that gives people the choice and the freedom to live at home. Congress should act to ensure there are good jobs for workers like me and quality care for consumers like Zebty.

Thank you.