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May 13, 2024

Hon. Marvin Abney, Chairman  
Committee on Finance  
Rhode Island House of Representatives  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: Support for House Bill 7298 "Medicaid Home Care Rate Increases"**

I represent HomeCare Advantage, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation 30-year company which uniquely provides care for both long-term CNA and Nursing services as well as Home Health nursing and therapy services on a visit basis also known as a certified agency.

I would like to share a story related to each line of business.

First, our non-skilled agency alone has lost over 100 CNA's in the past 3 years and will not get them back any time soon. They have moved on to other states, healthcare institutions as well as other professions.

What used to be a career path with the earning potential of approx. \$5-8 more per hour plus benefits has disappeared. This is hard and grueling work that takes a compassionate heart and a special person.

In addition to CNA's for personal care assistance we provide Nursing care for trach and vented high complexity patients as well as patients with other disabilities in need of nursing assistance. For these patients having a nurse can mean the difference of life or death. Many of our nurses have left or cut their hours due to career opportunities that take will make them more money. Those who remain (mostly older nurses close to retirement) are holding on to provide some support for the families. After caring for these patients for years, they know without them they would have no one to fill their vacancy. Out of a dozen of nurses on this payroll none have been hired within the last year, in fact I have only hired 1 in the last 8 years.

My second story is our skilled agency. This too is struggling with employee turnover and recruitment. I have been down a ½ dozen nursing positions since 2020 and the reality is that they move on to better opportunities which will gain them more money. This type of nursing requires a different skill set such as wound care specialists, chronic diseases managers and diabetic educators to name a few. They service highly complex patients and receiving care at home is crucial to their being able to remain in the community.

Home Care is a proven, more cost-effective solution to the state than institutional care. Why burden a broken system with overcrowded hospital ERs or nursing home settings when these patients can be managed effectively at home. The elderly are safe, and their mental health is better when they are getting care within their own home.

As a state, what good is providing educational opportunities to become a CNA, Nurse or Therapist in RI, if they leave to service another's states elderly and sick population.

In conclusion, the OHIC report demonstrated that when RI is compared to other New England states, RI reimbursement rates for home care are 41% to 74% less. This report did not even address the skilled services of nursing and therapist I described above. What this means is that states such as MA and CT can steal the best and brightest CNA's, Nurses, and Therapists because they can pay their employees 43% more than us.

With our rates of reimbursement and the heavy cost of back-office operations such as authorizations, scheduling and Quality oversight, agencies cannot survive.

Please don't let this OHIC report sit on a shelf and become obsolete. Each day the information is getting old. Since this report has been finalized other states have once again received significant increases. They see the value of home care. Again, we will have no homecare left in RI because we cannot compete.

I respectfully ask you to **support including House Bill 7298**, sponsored by Representative Patricia Serpa, in the SFY25 budget to fully-fund home care services for Rhode Island's most vulnerable. Including the language in this bill in the SFY25 budget will raise wages to stabilize and grow the home care workforce necessary to provide care at home for Rhode Islanders in need. If you have any questions, please contact me at 401-781-3400 or [Cheryl@homecareadvantage.com](mailto:Cheryl@homecareadvantage.com)

Thank you.

*Cheryl Levesque*

Cheryl Levesque  
Executive Director