March 4, 2021

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Nichole Ward and I live in North Providence. I started working at Greenville over 10 years ago as a dietary aide. Before that, I used to work at Dunkin and I have family who works at McDonalds, so I understand how the food industry can work.

Please support the Nursing Home Safe Staffing and Quality Care Act (H-5012 Rep. Slater).

Being a dietary aide at a nursing home isn't just scrubbing pots and flipping burgers. The residents need to eat each day, so as a dietary aide, you take on a lot of responsibility. You need to know how everything in that kitchen runs. Dietary aides in a nursing home need to know the dietary restrictions, like renal diets, ground diets, puree diets, allergies, etc. You get to know the residents as a dietary aide, what they like and what they don't like. It's a lot of responsibility for basically minimum wage, since nutrition is so important to the residents' health.

Then 6 years ago, I went back to school to be a Certified Nursing Assistant. As a CNA, you're responsible for the hands-on care of our residents. Without us, they wouldn't get out of bed, get dressed, shower, or sometimes even eat. Lots of patients can't eat on their own so we have to assist them. Being a CNA is hugely stressful and time consuming. We have too many residents and just a limited amount of time to provide proper care. Then I went back to school to become a Certified Medication Technician (CMT). Now I have even more responsibility, passing medications to all my residents. In most states, this would be the job of an LPN, but I only make a little over $17/hr to do this work.

We work short roughly half the week. When we're working short, the residents don't get the care they need. They rely on us, and we can't give them the care they need, they feel lonely and rejected. Especially in COVID times when their family can't visit, but even before that because a lot of our residents don't really have family that visits. We're there family. They get human connection from us, but when we're short and running, they don't get that human conversation and connection that they need.

For example, one day last week, there were only 3 CNAs on one of our units, with 31 residents who can't leave their room due to COVID. A resident was asking to go back to bed since 1:00pm, but it takes two people to transfer someone into bed and we were just too busy. It was almost 4:00pm before we finally got him laying down. Imagine if it took 3 hours to lay down when you wanted to. Another patient's bed was broken. Another patient had to wait to use the bathroom.

I work for one of the largest nursing home companies in the country called Genesis Healthcare. We've had a hectic, crazy, horrible year. Our residents were isolated because of COVID, we worked short constantly. One of my coworkers died of COVID. Another's husband died. Over a dozen of our residents died of COVID, people I have known and loved for years.

The former CEO of Genesis got a $5.2 million retention bonus this year, then he retired. That's on top of a $935,000 annual bonus, $650,000 retirement bonus, and $300,000 consulting contract. That means he made *at least* $7.5 million last year while we worked short every day

and my residents and coworkers died. And that money came mostly from Medicaid, meaning our tax dollars paid for this greed.

I can't tell you how disappointed and upset I am in the company I work for. They should have used that money for the patients or their workers who are taking care of them. Or even supplies. Even in November, 8 months into this pandemic, we were running out of gowns when our patients were testing positive for COVID. My coworkers have to go out and buy disinfecting wipes or milk because the home runs out.

A dietary aide has to go out and buy milk, but the CEO makes $7.5 million off of our tax dollars. This is all just so wrong.

The nursing home companies may line up to tell you they can't afford it. But we see they're lying. Genesis always tells us our home is losing money. But the tax payers are the ones losing money. The residents and healthcare heroes are the ones suffering.

Now I'm in school to become a Nursing Home Administrator. I want to run a nursing home the right way, to give my staff and residents the supplies, wages, and care they need. But too many nursing homes put profit over their residents.

We need the General Assembly to pass the Nursing Home Safe Staffing and Quality Care Act. We need to stop this corporate greed and give the money to the people who need it.

Sincerely,

Nichole Ward, North Providence, CNA