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United for Quality Care

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Testimony in Support of H-5228 – Supporting Self-Directed Care and Direct Support Professionals

Chair Corvese and Honorable Members of the House Labor Committee,

My name is Emanuel Rodriguez. I am from Coventry and have been taking care of my older brother, Jorge, for the last five years through the **Personal Choice Program**.

I am here to voice my strong support for **H-5228**, which would extend the right to join a union to more caregivers like me.

Growing up, our mother was the primary caregiver for my brother, who was born developmentally delayed. But when she decided to go back to school to become a middle school teacher, I stepped in as his caregiver through the Personal Choice program. I even went to school for a year to study mechanical engineering but decided that caring for my brother was more rewarding—knowing I am helping Jorge learn life skills and gain independence.

In addition, I also work a second job as a paraprofessional for special needs kids in the Coventry School District. I start my day around 7 a.m., and once that job ends, I head over to care for Jorge until about 9 p.m. I love my brother and am glad I can help him, but the job is tough. I can only take a day off once in a blue moon, and vacation is out of the question.

Because of a bill passed in 2023, caregivers like me in the Personal Choice program finally had the opportunity to join a union—and I just voted to do exactly that. Having that right means I can fight for better pay and respect. Until I got involved in the union, I didn't even know I could ask for a raise—and I've been making \$15 an hour for five years. The work we do as home health care workers is important, but it's often misunderstood.

H-5228 would extend the same right to organize to more caregivers across Rhode Island, so they too can have a voice and the support they deserve. When we're able to organize, we can improve our own lives and the care we give to the people who count on us.

That's why I'm asking you to support H-5228 today.

Respectfully,

Emanuel Rodriguez