



April 30, 2026

Subject: Testimony in Support of H-7361 – Supporting Self-Directed Care and Direct Support Professionals, Submitted by a Member of SEIU 1199NE

Dear Chairman Corvese and Honorable Members of the House Labor Committee:

My name is Emanuel Rodriguez, and I am from Coventry. For the past six years, I have been caring for my older brother, Jorge, through the Personal Choice Program.

H-7361 would extend the right to join a union to more caregivers like me, and I strongly support it.

Growing up, our mother was the primary caregiver for my brother, who was born with developmental disabilities. When she decided to go back to school to become a middle school teacher, I stepped in to take on that responsibility. I even went to school for a year to study mechanical engineering, but I chose to leave and care for my brother because I found it more meaningful. I am helping Jorge learn life skills and become more independent.

In addition to caring for my brother, I also work a second job as a paraprofessional for students with special needs in the Coventry School District. My day starts around 7:00 a.m., and after that job ends, I go home to care for Jorge until about 9:00 p.m.

I love my brother and am grateful that I can be there for him, but the work is demanding. Taking time off is difficult, and vacation is not really an option.

Because of a bill passed in 2023, caregivers like me in the Personal Choice Program finally had the opportunity to join a union. I voted to join the union last year, and the union is currently working to negotiate its first contract with the state. Having that right means I can advocate for better pay and respect. Before getting involved, I didn't even realize I could ask for a raise, and I have been earning minimum wage for years. The work we do as home care workers is essential, but it is often overlooked.

H-7361 would extend that same right to organize to more caregivers across Rhode Island, so they can have a voice and the support they deserve. When workers are able to come together, it improves both our lives and the care we provide to the people who depend on us.

I urge you to support H-7361.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Emanuel Rodriguez,
Personal Care Attendant