

Statement of Bryant Greene on behalf of Always Best Care Senior Services, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania House Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Tax, and Capital Access “Small Business Workforce Development Needs and How to Address the Skills Gap”

June 14, 2018

Chairman Brat, Ranking Member Evans, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for convening today’s hearing on Small Business Workforce Development Needs and How to Address the Skills Gap.

My name is Bryant Greene and I am the owner of Always Best Care Senior Services in both Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and throughout Delaware. ABC Senior Services is one of the nation’s leading providers of non-medical in-home care, assisted living placement services and skilled home health care. It is an honor for me to be here today to testify before the subcommittee and to share my experience as a private sector employer working to address the skills gap in my industry.

Background

As the owner of ABC Senior Services, I have more than 25 years of day to day operations experience, which includes staffing and workforce development in a health care environment. In addition to my experience in home health care, I currently serve on the Public Policy Committee/Political Action Committee Board of the Pennsylvania Homecare Association and am a member of the Board of Trustees of the Philadelphia University Legacy Board (now acquired by Thomas Jefferson University), the Overbrook School for the Blind in Philadelphia, the Magee Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation Board of Directors and the board of Philadanco.

Growing up, I was part of a family who qualified for 1199C benefits—which provide eligible union members with comprehensive educational services in the healthcare field. As a result, my mother, grandmother and I were able to attend college in the same time frame, giving us the chance to persist and succeed in our chosen fields. Without access to this type of targeted training, I would not be where I am today.

Middle-skill gap in home health care

Middle-skill jobs, like those at ABC Senior Services, account for 53 percent of United States’ labor market, but only 43 percent of the country’s workers are trained at the middle-skill level. In health care industries, this skills gap is even more pronounced.

Home healthcare is one of the fastest growing industries in the U.S. As the labor market has tightened, employers like ABC Senior Services increasingly struggle to identify hires with credentials and work experience, both of which are required to earn licenses. When there were more workers looking for jobs, new entrants earned work experience in helper roles, enabling a constant stream of newly licensed workers to meet middle-skill demand. With lower levels of unemployment, this pipeline no longer exists.

For small and medium sized businesses like ABC Senior Services in particular, the skills gap can create daunting challenges when it comes to hiring and retaining workers.

Challenges in Recruiting Workers

First, quality in-home health care requires the right kind of person. ABC Senior Services looks for kind, compassionate caregivers who treat clients with dignity and respect. We provide in-home care services, both companion and personal care. We serve patients with Alzheimer's, dementia and cancer. In addition to comfort and companionship, we offer dressing, escort/transportation, errands, bathing and grooming, incontinence care, light housekeeping, grocery shopping and meal preparation, laundry and medication reminders. Recruiting the right person for this work requires significant outreach to our community, a detailed interview process and a structured on-boarding process. ABC has over 1000 caregivers, but we can't do this on our own. We have worked with PA career link, diversity career fairs, social organizations and training programs like 1199c to recruit individuals into the field. These community partnerships help us identify a diverse set of workers across our service area and fill roles in the company.

I also work with community organizations and re-entry programs that serve individuals who have been released from incarceration. The PA Older Adult Protective Services Act (OAPSA) requires all homecare agency employees to complete criminal background checks prior to hire. However, a 2015 court decision by the Commonwealth of PA—known as Peake v. Commonwealth—found lifetime bans on employment unconstitutional. Although background checks are still required, the Department of Aging now recommends that providers perform a risk assessment if they choose to hire an individual with a prior criminal conviction. While we are awaiting more guidance from the state, we believe this is a step in the right direction—and urge federal policymakers to consider similar measures when it comes to addressing barriers to hiring.

Challenges training new and incumbent workers

Training new workers in the home health field requires dedication and intensity. All of the jobs at ABC Senior Services call for on-the-job training to ensure each client has access to quality, personalized in-home care program. Every one of our team members and care givers receive comprehensive training before being assigned to a care plan. Our workers also receive periodic reviews and upskilling opportunities.

To help provide greater opportunities for our workers, I sit on the advisory board for 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund, AFSCME affiliated labor-management partnership. I, along with several other business leaders work with 1199c staff to identify core competencies for home health care workers and translate that into curriculum and training 1199c can deliver, complemented by the training my team can deliver workers on the job. This partnership is vital, but takes significant work. Currently, 1199c is funding a portion of their work and subsidizing the cost of training through federal DOL grants and with funding from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. I urge policy makers to continue investments in our workforce and apprenticeship systems, as they are crucial to supporting the efforts of small businesses working to close the skills gap.

Challenges Retaining Workers

Retaining workers is also a tremendous challenge. Much of my workforce consists of part-time workers since the average care plan is 3-6 hours a day. Additionally, because of low Medicaid reimbursement rates, homecare agencies can only afford to pay \$10-12 an hour on average. Given the nature of the

tasks caregivers must perform daily, I feel this level of compensation is inadequate and does not provide an incentive for individuals to remain in the field. These workers can easily find higher pay in the retail and food service industries—which is one of the main reasons the industry has a turnover rate of 70 percent.

Also, the insufficient Medicaid reimbursement rate makes it difficult for homecare agencies to cover the increasing cost of providing care and services to seniors. Within the last six months, additional background check and child abuse clearance requirements for home healthcare workers have been handed down by the state of Pennsylvania. While these background checks are undeniably important, the cost of hiring just one direct care worker is projected to increase by \$43 in 2019, yet Medicaid reimbursement rates are set to stay the same.

Conclusion

We can all agree that home healthcare workers are crucial to providing high-quality care to some of the most vulnerable members of our society. I am here today to tell you that our industry is facing significant hurdles when it comes to building and maintaining a strong pipeline of workers—and there is no doubt in my mind that this will adversely affect millions of Americans if not corrected. I ask that federal policymakers work to help provide education and training opportunities to individuals from all backgrounds who are looking to find and retain gainful employment. We cannot afford to miss this opportunity to close our nation's growing skills gap. Thank you.