

9/24/2022

To Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and Members of the Subcommittee,

My name is Amanda Gruber, my friends and family call me Mandy. I am the youngest of 7 kids. My mother was a nurse for 52 years and served in several positions in healthcare from floor nurse to Director of Nursing. As soon as we were old enough, we were privileged to start volunteering in the nursing home where she worked. We would call Bingo, visit, and offer them moments of joy and smiles. As we reached the age of 16, we jumped into service as a certified nursing assistant. My mother's greatest joy was providing service to the elderly with dignity, respect, and honoring them with the best possible care.

Throughout the 27 years in my career in healthcare, I have seen the struggles of low wages and shortage of staffing. I have seen the facilities struggle to make ends meet, and recently many facilities in our area are closing. Why in 27 years, has this never changed? The reimbursement rates are incredulous. The lack of support is astounding. As the pandemic started, the already tired and exhausted staff dug in their heels. For a moment in time, we felt valued and appreciated by the community and we were claimed to be heroes. It was overshadowed by fear and uncertainty of what we were up against. The lack of masks, gloves, and personal protective equipment (ppe), the inadequate staffing due to illness and exposure, the million extra steps to ensure the resident's safety, and the lack of reimbursement was severely disappointing. Regardless of these, our team stepped up. We worked together and somehow made it through. But none of us made it out unscathed. After all we had been through, the lack of support, care, and even financial reimbursement, created what was known as the great resignation. Our staffing decreased even more, which just added more work on those who were left behind.

We gave it our all, both at work and home. We homeschooled our children, took care of elderly family members, worked countless hours on the covid units, worked with minimum protective equipment, and still were criticized and fined by MDH. Why? In what way does it make sense to punish those who have endured so much? The pandemic may or may not be over, but we are still dealing with the aftermath of it. Starting Nursing assistants make just over \$14 an hour. Working at fast food restaurants or Walmart/Target starts them out at \$15-20/hour. Caring for our residents is a difficult, hard job and staff deserve to be compensated fairly. Our wages are a direct influence from reimbursement rates. I believe our healthcare workers deserve fair wages, especially with the increase of duties placed upon them with this pandemic.

During the covid outbreak at my facility, I had to take over four jobs: working as a household coordinator (activity assistant), a nursing assistant on the floor, outdoor visitor scheduler guide with family and residents, and staffing scheduler, because staff were exposed, tested positive for covid, or had families they had to care for and were unable to come to work. During this time, my father, who was admitted to my facility prior to our outbreak, contracted COVID, and passed away. This paragraph alone cannot emphasize the feelings of grief I still feel today. None of us had time to grieve, rest, or even breathe since this pandemic started. I am just one person, there are a million more people who have experiences similar to mine.

The responsibility lies on you to change the future. If there is not immediate action to change the future of all nursing homes, there won't be anyone or anywhere for the most precious of our society to go, to receive the care they need, or to feel loved and valued.

The low wages HAVE to be changed. I have coworkers that have told me they literally will have to quit because they can't afford rent, due to low wages. We shouldn't have to choose between taking care of our children and taking care of people who have become our family (our residents). Staff may not have food to feed their families, gas to get to work, or money to pay their rent and utilities, but they know and care for their residents with passion and love, and the least we can do is offer them fair compensation.

Working at Three Links is not just a job, this is my home. My years of experience in health care has allowed me to understand how we all work together to improve the lives of those we serve, because together we can achieve everything we hope for and more. In what ways can you help us work together to receive fair and adequate compensation for all the caregivers and facilities that still serve our seniors today, before they vanish?

Thank you for allowing me to share my passion and love of the world's greatest treasure, our seniors.

PLEASE support our seniors, our elderly, our caregivers,

For one day.....

it may be someone you know.....

it may be you.....

and who do you want to care for you?

And will there even be a place for you to live?

Sincerely,

Amanda M. Gruber