



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chairman Mark DeSaulnier (CA-11)

Joint Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions and Higher Education and Workforce

Investment Hearing

Care for Our Communities: Investing in the Direct Care Workforce

Zoom

Tuesday, July 20, 2021 | 10:15 a.m.

Today we will be hearing about the valuable work informed by America's direct care workforce, and the urgent need to expand these services for aging Americans and individuals with disabilities.

Direct care makes it possible for millions of people to live independently in their homes and communities. The degree to which these vital services enhance the quality of life for aging and disabled Americans cannot be overstated. They enable individuals who need assistance with activities of daily living to live healthy and productive lives and remain active participants in their communities.

We know that people want to stay at home, and they want to stay in their communities as long as possible and as much as possible. Direct care workers are a crucial part to ending the unnecessary segregation and advancing the civil rights of individuals with disabilities, as outlined in Supreme Court's 1999 *Olmstead* decision.

Unfortunately, these services are often unaffordable and inaccessible for those who need it most.

Private insurance and Medicare often provide only limited coverage for home and community-based services, forcing family members and friends to care for loved ones or, alternatively, pay out-of-pocket for these services until their resources are depleted enough for Medicaid to kick in.

The demand for direct care is also rapidly outpacing the growth of the direct care workforce. And unfortunately, individuals who need home and community-based services often find it impossible to access the support they need.

The direct care sector is expected to add more than 1.3 million jobs between 2018 and 2028. Yet, the number of people who will need direct care continues to exceed the number of workers who can provide it. To address this shortage, we must understand the causes.

Direct care workers—disproportionally women of color—are chronically undervalued and overworked.

Medicaid is, by far, the largest funding source for direct care services, and Medicaid reimbursement rates have not allowed wages to increase as fast as those these occupations. Today, roughly 1 in 6 direct care workers lives in poverty. *1 in 6 of these workers lives in poverty.*

The turnover rate for the direct care workforce in 2018 was 82 percent. And that was before the pandemic, which forced more than 200,000 direct care workers to leave their jobs.

Today, we will discuss the need to ensure access to direct care services for those who need them and also support the workforce that delivers these services.

The American Jobs Plan calls for robust investments to expand access to home and community-based services from Medicaid and strengthen the workforce through higher wages, better benefits, and sector-based job training and supports.

The *Direct Creation, Advancement, and Retention of Employment Opportunity Act of 2021*, or *Direct CARE Opportunity Act* also expands workers' earning potential and provides the financial assistance for transportation, child care, and housing that workers need to stay in their jobs.

Our society and our economy depend on direct care workers. They deserve better— as do their clients. We are committed to that cause.

I now recognize the distinguished Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions for the purpose of making an opening statement. Mr. Allen, good morning.