

Lauren Thompson Testifies in Support of Home Care Contract

My name is Lauren Thompson and I live in Champlin. Today you've heard about some of the numbers for the home care contract and now I would like to share the reality of what that means for me and tens of thousands of Minnesotans across the state who are like me. I was born with cerebral palsy and rely on direct care services to survive.

I need help with everything from getting up and dressed in the morning to meal prep to cleaning. I was a client on the PCA Choice program, but I could never get as much PCA coverage for the help that I needed. So my Mom had to be my primary caregiver. After many years of taking care of me, it took a toll on her, and she got hurt and couldn't take care of me anymore. So I had to move to a group home when I was 22. And then I had to move briefly to a nursing home, and I have now had to be in assisted living care for six years.

And the staffing crisis has reached there, too, with the client-PCA ratio often being 11 people to one staff. When you hear the term "care crisis," this is what we're talking about. I believe that Minnesota wants to be a caring place where everyone has the opportunity to live full, productive lives. But this isn't happening for thousands of Minnesotans like me. Our state's lack of investment over the years has meant that myself and others like me don't have the opportunity or the freedom to live like we want to, or more importantly, even live like we should.

I have gone hours waiting for care. I've had to go un-showered at times, and I've gone without a clean home. My exercise routine often has to be ignored because my care usually has to be about getting the necessities done. All these things can add to my physical pain, but emotionally, it's draining, too. It's hard for me to make plans to work or do anything else because I quite simply don't know when I'll be able to get out of bed in the morning.

I was on the bargaining committee for this contract because I want to fix the program so I can be on PCA Choice again, and live a happier, more productive life. I believe this contract is a step in the right direction. The wage floor increase, the reimbursement rate increases and the training increases are a step in the right direction. A \$13.25 wage floor increase isn't going to solve the care crisis, and it's not going to bring enough new workers into these jobs to fill the 8,000 vacancies. But it's a big step forward from 12 dollars an hour.

Ultimately, to value home care workers is to value people with disabilities. Underinvestment leads not only to economic hardships, but to deep social and moral disparities that are hard to quantify because our lives depend on these things. For clients and workers alike, I ask that you take this step forward in passing the new home care contract.