

VOICES FOR BETTER HEALTH

**Economic Progress Institute
Rhode Island Organizing Project
Senior Agenda Coalition of RI**

Testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 2648

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Thank you, Senators DiPalma, Miller, Seveney, Sosnowski and Felag for introducing this bill which would utilize \$17,000,000 to increase wages of home care staff, strengthening RI's HCBC system supporting aging with adequate care in the community.

On behalf **Voices for Better Health** -- a collaborative project of the Economic Progress Institute, Rhode Island Organizing Project and Senior Agenda Coalition of RI – I am pleased to testify in support this bill. It will provide needed funding to help to ensure that the economics of our state's care system will be sustainable and viable for the care of so many who are dependent on Medicaid support. Because payment levels for direct care services have not been updated in years, the low pay level of direct care workers has created workforce shortages, the impoverishment of these workers and has put at risk our ability to provide proper care for our aging elder population.

Home care and direct care workers are among the lowest paid in the state's labor force. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in the May Occupation Wage Survey Reports show that Home Health and Personal Care Aide jobs grew in RI by 1,330 (19.1%) from 2020 to 2021, to a total of 8,300 workers, rebounding from pandemic job losses. The high demand for home care workers, however, did not increase wages overall. While the lowest paid workers (10th percentile) saw wages increase 12.5% from \$12.20 per hour in 2020 to \$13.73 in 2021, the average wage for all home care workers increased by only 0.5% percent, from \$14.80 per hour in 2020 to \$14.87 in 2021. New hires were getting higher starting wages while established care workers saw little or no pay increases. Shamefully, an estimated 1 in 5 RI home care workers live in poverty and most have insufficient incomes to meet their basic needs.

This allocation of the Perry Sullivan dedicated state funds to increase the wages of direct care workers will have a dramatic impact on improving the economic well-being of those who care for our loved ones.