

TESTIMONY BEFORE
OHIO SENATE MEDICAID COMMITTEE

Misty Cunningham
Independent Provider; Midwest Home Care
05/09/2023

Chair Romanchuk, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the committee, I am Misty Cunningham, an independent provider and agency-contracted provider with Midwest Home Care. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on House Substitute Bill 33.

Who is going to help?

I would like to start my testimony with what it means to be a home health aide. Usually my day starts like any other person's—getting myself and my family ready, fed, bathed, and dressed. My clients need these services first thing in the morning, too. They need help with their medications and breakfast, transportation to doctor appointments, and then I also prepare their lunches and dinners. In the evenings I do the same for my own family, but then I must go back to my clients to care for them, too.

A home health aide is not a maid. We are providing essential services to keep people living independently at home. They may seem like small tasks, but without an aide to provide meals, cleaning, or transferring in and out beds and bathrooms, my clients would suffer in their own homes.

I take care of people seven days a week. My clients often have nobody else to take care of them—even family. It can be overwhelming sometimes, but somebody has to do it. Their needs are still important even if no one is there to help. Sometimes all they need is someone to come in for an hour or two in the evening to be a companion, fold laundry, wash the dishes, or help them get into bed. It is impossible to find someone to do these simple tasks because they do not feel appreciated. They feel belittled by the pay they would receive for two hours of work. I pick up

the pieces so my clients have an aide. These people in your districts need help, but who is going to help them? I often wonder if someone will be there to care for me when I become their age.

How can we fix it?

There are a few solutions to the provider workforce that I believe are urgent. First, there should be strict laws regulating the training and qualifications of home health aides to make sure that people who care genuinely about their clients instead of the paycheck are working in this field. These people have hearts and they need aides that care genuinely. Proper training with aides and clients would make everyone more comfortable. We need to build the relief system so aides are not working 60 or more hours a week. Urgent and clear communication about the job would recognize its importance and reduce turnover and mistreatment.

This brings me to my second point. I am also concerned about the pay rates not only related to value of services, but also related to the training requirements. I am nearly an STNA without any licensure due to my required monthly trainings. However, STNAs are making more money than home health aides for the same job and nearly the same training. STNAs, though, are not going into people's homes and taking their clients' lives home with them. They may have set numbers of hours and weekends or days off. On the other hand, aides may not work if their client goes into the hospital, and so many work more than 40 hours or five days a week. It is hard to understand why these requirements are in place since they make training, getting paid, and managing time more difficult without receiving any sort of certification or financial relief.

A home health aide that is dedicated to their clients is working sun up to sun down, while still trying to provide for themselves and their own families. We need help to keep helping our clients. We need to worry and stress less about paying our own bills to make ends meet while caring for our community. The difference between us and people working for similar pay at places like McDonald's is that we need to genuinely care about our clients and have a calling to do this extremely necessary job. Our pay is not reflective of the value of our work.

Is love the key?

I may not have served in the armed forces for the United States of America, but I can imagine

what it's like to fight for a country and dedicate yourself to the wellbeing of it, and then not be honored for that when the day is done. Home health aides like me need some sort of honor and recognition to pay the bills, make our lives easier, and allow us to continue doing this essential job that we want to do. I have worked other jobs and I have worked in offices; it is not the same. I now work seven days a week, morning, noon, and night not only because my clients need help but also because this is the job I want to do. I could have gone to school or become a social worker, but timing is of the essence and I had to approach life early on. I always told myself that one day I would do what makes me happy. I have found my calling making other people feel like they have something to live for. It has been a pleasure to serve the City of Akron for every little thing I can do in this community, on and off for the past 18 years and consistently for the past five.

There is a need out here. On behalf of home health aides, we would more than appreciate an increase to \$20/hour so we can feel a purpose in our society. Please, help us help us. We need help. The community needs more love.

If you have the time, please view a video testimony from me [here](#). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.