

TESTIMONY OF AIDA GARCIA
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PRESENTED TO THE FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING
FIELD HEARING
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Good morning. My name is Aida Garcia and I am the Executive Vice President of the Homecare Division of 1199 SEIU. We wish to thank Chairwoman Waters, Congresswoman Velazquez and the Committee for allowing us to present this testimony today. 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East represents 90,000 homecare workers in New York, Massachusetts, Maryland and Washington D.C. In New York City alone, 1199 represents over 50,000 homecare workers who provide home-based care to the elderly and disabled.

1199 SEIU fully supports and applauds the Together We Care Act of 2009 introduced by Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez. The aging baby boomer generation will require healthcare attention that will exceed the current supply of long term care healthcare providers. We must create new possibilities and new opportunities now in order to be prepared to care for seniors and those who live with disabilities in the future. This legislation is a critical step forward in addressing this need and preparing the homecare workforce to care for families and their loved ones throughout the country.

How we prepare for the future demand facing our healthcare system is one of the most critical challenges facing our country today. The reality is -- we will need another 2 million newly trained healthcare workers in order to be ready for comprehensive healthcare reform.

There are 47 million people living without health insurance, many more are underinsured, and many more who do not access services they may be eligible to receive. If our healthcare system is to increase our capacity to deliver high quality care, we must dramatically increase education and training opportunities for existing healthcare workers, as well as those who are called to this honorable and rewarding profession.

We need to ensure that for everyone who wants to enter the healthcare field, there are education and training options that are affordable and accessible.

Most seniors prefer to remain in the comfort and familiarity of their own home. Studies have consistently shown that home-based care improves patient outcomes and increases lifespan for the elderly and disabled. In addition, it is far more cost effective to provide home-based care versus in-patient care in an institutional facility.

Many families struggle to balance the responsibilities of work and caring for a grandparent, parent, or sibling who needs affordable and continuous care. Far too many low-income residents do not have the resources they need to take advantage of the quality care home-based caregivers provide. Instead, they often rely on family and friends, or worse, go without care entirely.

This places an incredible stress on families, and it can lead to real complications in care – all of which can be prevented by offering sustained and professional care options in the home. This legislation will ease the minds of those families, and allow those who need care to remain in their homes, and to lead independent lives.

As healthcare workers, we know that having reliable, professional care at home can make all the difference. It can greatly improve the quality of life for our seniors and those living with disabilities – allowing them to stay within their homes and communities. This is a choice that so many people would make if it were an option and if they could afford it.

With this legislation, Congresswoman Velazquez has taken two challenges – that of creating real career options where there is both a gaping lack of opportunity and a growing need, and that of caring for those who want to remain in their homes -- and forged a new path.

Together with US Housing and Urban Development officials and community advocates, she has created a new model that will truly improve the lives of working families across this city and the country.

We thank Congresswoman Velazquez for her outstanding leadership and commitment to our community and the healthcare profession.