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**Testimony of Kristin D. Ewing, Policy Counsel
DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice**

**Committees on Health & Executive Administration and Labor:
Strategies to Support DC's Long Term Care Workforce**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Strategies to Support the District of Columbia's Long Term Care Workforce

My name is Kristin Ewing, and I am Policy Counsel at the DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice (DC Appleseed). DC Appleseed is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that has a proven track record of taking on some of the District's most challenging problems, developing proposed solutions to those problems, and then working to implement our proposed solutions. Our work has significantly contributed to making the District a better place to live and work.

Much of my work at DC Appleseed focuses on health equity and economic justice, with the goal of creating an equitable, just, and thriving city for all District residents. My testimony today will focus on the District's long term care crisis; why investing in the long term care workforce is vital to providers, consumers, and the District; removing barriers to a robust long term care workforce; and the need for a coordinated and strategic whole government and whole District response to the long term care workforce crisis to ensure an adequate workforce to meet the needs of District residents, particularly aging residents and those living on low incomes.

The Long Term Care Crisis

DC Appleseed is a member of the DC Coalition on Long Term Care and chairs the Coalition's Workforce Committee. The Coalition's work is increasingly vital as the District faces a long term care crisis that will continue to escalate due to the increased needs of the large "Baby Boomer" generation. In the District, [the population aged 65 and older is projected to grow by nearly 25% between 2019 and 2030.](#) Unfortunately, while we experience a growing need for long term care, we are simultaneously seeing the workforce decline as providers leave the industry, and we fail to address the barriers to retention or create an adequate pipeline and pathway to fill these vacancies. During the renewal cycle in the fall of 2023, [over 4,000 formerly licensed Certified Nurse Aides \(CNAs\) and Home Health Aides \(HHAs\) did not renew their credentials, representing roughly 30% of the long term care workforce.](#) The urgency of this growing crisis cannot be overstated, and the District can and must take steps to intervene through a coordinated response that involves multiple stakeholders.

Investing in the Long Term Care Workforce is Crucial

Supporting and investing in the long term care workforce improves outcomes for consumers, workers and their families, and the broader community.

1. **Quality of Care:** A well-trained and adequately compensated workforce results in higher-quality care for residents. Skilled caregivers are better equipped to meet the complex needs of individuals, ensuring that they receive personalized and effective care.
2. **Improved Outcomes:** Better-trained and supported caregivers can lead to improved health outcomes for residents, including fewer hospitalizations, enhanced mental health, and a greater sense of well-being among those receiving care. Fully staffed shifts in facilities, as well as the ability to staff all home care shifts, also improve outcomes.
3. **Staff Retention and Satisfaction:** Investing in the workforce through competitive wages, benefits, and professional development opportunities can improve job satisfaction and retention rates. Higher pay tends to lead to greater job satisfaction and improved worker morale. When employees feel valued through fair compensation, it can enhance productivity and reduce turnover, benefiting employers, employees, and consumers.
4. **Training and Development:** Providing ongoing training and education helps workers stay updated on best practices and advancements in caregiving. This investment not only

enhances their skills but also boosts their confidence and effectiveness in their roles.

5. **Reduction of Poverty:** Currently, 76% of DC's direct care workforce relies on some form of public assistance, with 56% relying on Medicaid. Increasing wages can help lift individuals and families out of poverty more effectively than public benefits, which often provide only temporary relief. Sustainable wage increases can significantly reduce reliance on safety-net programs. While government benefits are essential for supporting individuals facing economic hardship, increasing wages represents a proactive approach that leads to greater independence, economic growth, and improved overall well-being.
6. **Long-term Financial Stability:** A living wage offers a sustainable solution for long-term financial security. While benefits assist in times of need, higher wages empower individuals to improve their economic situations, leading to greater financial independence and stability and allowing families to invest in their futures.
7. **Racial and Gender Equity:** Improving outcomes for long term care workers is a racial and gender equity issue, as 77% of this workforce is female and 87% are Black or African American.
8. **Worker Health and Well-being:** Higher wages can lead to improved access to healthcare and reduced financial stress. This can lead to improved health outcomes and reduce government healthcare costs in the long run.
9. **Improved Quality of Life:** Increased wages can enable workers to thrive without having to work overtime or hold multiple jobs, allowing them time to rest, care for themselves and their families, and participate in their community. This improves overall quality of life, job satisfaction, and job performance.
10. **Supporting the District's Health Care System:** A robust workforce supports the overall healthcare system by reducing the use of EMS, emergency rooms, and hospitals, freeing up emergency responders, ER providers, and hospital beds for those in need. Adequate home care staffing also enables consumers to receive care at home when practical and desired, thereby freeing up beds in facilities for those who require a higher level of care.
11. **Community Building:** Investing in workforce initiatives can foster a sense of community and teamwork among staff, creating a positive work environment. This can enhance collaboration and ultimately improve the experience for both caregivers and residents.
12. **Economic Impact:** A substantial long term care workforce contributes to the economy by creating jobs, fostering a sustainable model of care, and stabilizing the overall healthcare system. Increased wages boost consumer spending, as individuals have more disposable income to spend, which in turn stimulates the local economy and supports local

businesses. Furthermore, adequate staffing enables consumers to receive care in the least restrictive setting, reduces the utilization of EMS and hospitals, and lowers overall medical needs through enhanced health outcomes, ultimately leading to lower Medicaid or Medicare costs.

Brown v. the District of Columbia

Investing in the workforce is also an increasingly pressing issue due to the recent holding in the *Brown v. DC* case. On December 31, 2024, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ruled in the class action case [Ivy Brown, et al. v. District of Columbia](#), determining that the District had violated the rights of District of Columbia residents under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The court found that DC failed to adequately inform nursing facility residents of their options for leaving to receive home health services, community-based support, and housing. Furthermore, DC failed to provide necessary assistance in facilitating the transition to the community. This ruling, which concluded 14 years of litigation initiated in 2010 by advocates including Disability Rights DC and AARP Foundation Litigation, underscored the government's obligation to provide the necessary information, assistance, and facilitation of the transition into the community in line with the ADA's integration mandate. Although this case centered on DACL's transition services and the availability of housing, DACL and the District will not be able to move residents with disabilities or seniors to community settings without a healthy long term care workforce, particularly for home health care.

Removing Barriers to a Robust Workforce

There are several concrete ways the District can work to alleviate barriers to a robust workforce, including:

1. **Advocating for the Swift Implementation of the Certified Nurse Aide Amendment Act of 2024:** We are grateful for the work DC Health and the Board of Nursing are undertaking to implement [this legislation](#), but we encourage them to continue to move swiftly to implement all provisions of this legislation and provide timely communication and guidance regarding this implementation. This legislation will specifically alleviate barriers to credentialing and licensing by:
 - a. Allowing CNAs to work in home care positions;

- b. Developing a universal credential for CNAs and HHAs; and
 - c. Expediting approval for Virginia and Maryland CNAs to work in the District.
2. **Supporting Medication Aide Training:** Support the swift establishment of Medication Aide training providers in the District to improve patient care and free nurses for other tasks. Standards for certification for Medication Aides were finalized in 2019. However, the Board of Nursing has not approved any training organizations to offer the training, although we understand several organizations have applied to serve as vendors.
 3. **Alleviating Barriers to Training and Credentialing:** Support initiatives to investigate the barriers to creating and sustaining successful training programs, as well as adequate and timely testing and credentialing for CNAs and HHAs.
 4. **Enhancing Communication:** Improve communication with providers, consumers, students, training facilities, families, and residents regarding changes in regulations, career pathways, and long term care programs and options.
 5. **Supporting Wage Increases for Long term Care Workers:** Low wages play a significant role in the District's long term care workforce shortage. While implementing the above recommendations can go a long way toward removing barriers, we must work to increase Medicaid rates to ensure that DC can attract workers for these roles. We are aware of the budget constraints ahead. Still, we must emphasize that the District can choose to invest in workers proactively by offering higher wages, thereby helping to stabilize the workforce and improve outcomes for both consumers and workers, or it can continue to reactively invest in workers through public benefits, perpetuating the workforce crisis and poor outcomes. The District is allocating budget dollars either way, but one approach has significantly more benefits for all involved in the system.

Whole Government Approach and Comprehensive Strategy

A comprehensive strategy to address workforce shortages would involve various stakeholders, including educational institutions, training providers, consumers, family members, advocates, community organizations, long term care providers, and government agencies, all working together to create a sustainable workforce and a robust plan for continued response to the crisis. Collaboration and communication among all parties involved will be key to developing practical solutions that can improve outcomes for those requiring long term care services and those providing these vital services. The DC government should adopt these key components of a whole government response:

1. **Supporting a DC Government Long Term Care Coordinator Role:** DC must identify and fund a person within the government to facilitate continuous collaboration and convening of all stakeholders. Given the many agencies and government entities involved in addressing the workforce crisis, including DC Health, the Board of Nursing, DHCF, OSSE, DACL, DMHHS, and others, there must be a designated long term care coordinator to break down siloes, convene the necessary government stakeholders on an ongoing basis, and serve as a liaison within the government and to non-government stakeholders.
2. **Increasing Funding and Resources:** Allocating more funds to support the recruitment and retention of staff in long term care positions is crucial. This could involve financial incentives, grants for training programs, higher Medicaid reimbursement rates, and resources for better working conditions.
3. **Streamlining Training Programs and Credentialing Across All Agencies:** To expedite workforce entry, DC must develop accelerated, accessible training programs and credentialing for new caregivers.
4. **Improving Working Conditions:** DC must focus on enhancing job satisfaction by addressing issues like workload, pay equity, benefits, and opportunities for career advancement. This includes creating a better work-life balance and improving economic outcomes for providers.
5. **Creating Public Awareness Campaigns:** DC should launch campaigns to:
 - a. Elevate the profile of long term care careers, showcasing them as rewarding and essential roles within the healthcare system, which will aid in recruitment and retention; and
 - b. Educate the public about the long term care crisis that will inevitably impact them or their loved ones.
6. **Developing Future-thinking Workforce Planning:** Engaging in long term workforce planning to identify future needs and trends in the sector is vital. This involves robust data collection and analysis to identify areas where shortages are likely to occur and proactively address them.
7. **Leveraging Technology:** Utilizing technology to improve training, credentialing, care delivery, career development, and communication with consumers and providers is critical.
8. **Enacting Policy Reforms:** Reviewing and reforming policies, regulations, and legislation that impact the long term care sector, including those that may hinder staffing flexibility or inhibit innovative practices, should be an ongoing process.



By implementing a coordinated and comprehensive approach, the government can work toward resolving the long term care workforce shortage and improving outcomes for those who need long term care and those who provide this vital service.

Thank you for your time and attention to these critical matters. We look forward to continuing to work together to make DC a better place to live and work. I am grateful for the opportunity to share my testimony and would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,



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