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My name is Narcissus Jackson. I am a Certified Nurse Aide at Keswick Multicare Center in Baltimore, Maryland. I have worked as a nurse aide for over 10 years. I am also a member of the Service Employees International Union, SEIU Local 1199 E-DC. Our union represents more than 100,000 nursing home workers across the country. Chairman Grassley, and other members of this committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.

There is no question in my mind that short staffing is the number one problem in nursing homes today. Nothing makes me more sad and frustrated than not having enough time to meet the needs of the residents I serve.

Let me explain to you what my typical day is like:

I work the evening shift that starts at 3pm and ends at 11pm. I usually have more than 15 residents to care for. During my eight-hour shift I have to:

- Make sure everyone gets dinner, which takes up to 2 hours because I have to get some of them transported to the dining room and back, prepare meals for people who eat in their rooms, and also feed the 2 or 3 of them who can't feed themselves.
- I also bathe and change everyone and get them ready for the bed.
- Throughout the evening I take people to the bathroom, and turn and prop the sickest ones.
- Two times per evening I drop everything and distribute nourishments - "Ensure" drinks - to about half my residents.
- I also have a list of people on the walking list. This means I have to spend 15 minutes each evening with these residents helping them to walk or do passive range of motion activities.
- Every few minutes throughout the evening I have to respond to call bells or alarms that we have on wheelchairs so people can remain restraint free.
- Finally, at the very end of the day I spend 1/2 hour doing my "bookwork." For each resident I must record how they are performing the activities of daily living or ADL's, which means tracking how much they ate, moved around, whether they had a bowel movement and other details.

As you can see, I have too much to do in too little time. I rarely take a full-length break or have time to eat my own dinner. Everyday I am frustrated because I know I should be doing more. I work as fast as I can but it is not physically possible to keep up with the demands on my time.

There is a name for this. It is called short staffing and it has a huge impact on patient care. Residents often do not get turned or repositioned every two hours, which means they develop bedsores. I feel sorry for residents who are in pain because of bedsores that could be avoided if we had time to take better care of them. I also feel sorry for the residents who need help with eating and drinking. A few have family members who come into to help them but most don't. I don't have time to sit with them long enough and I worry that they are losing weight. I also feel bad that I don't have time to answer my residents call buttons right away. When I am moving or changing one resident it can take several minutes. Meanwhile someone else is waiting to go to the bathroom. Residents deserve more. It hurts their dignity to lie in their own urine and feces waiting for one of us to come change them. These residents deserve better.

Workers deserve better too. I stick with my job because I like the residents. They tell me how much they like me and give me encouragement. Because we have a union, I also get paid more than the \$6 or \$7

dollars per hour that most nurse aides earn and I have health insurance coverage, unlike most nurse aides.

Other nurse aides I know have not been willing to stick with it. I have seen dozens of the women I work with come and go. Then the residents get upset because they have particular habits and needs that new people don't understand. Several people I know have hurt their backs trying to lift residents on their own because no one was around to help them. Then they leave because they can no longer meet the physical demands of the job.

Something must be done.

I am working through my union to change the laws so we can have the staff we need to do our job right. My union supports the proposed minimum staffing standards for nursing homes proposed by the National Citizens Coalition for Nursing Home Reform. These standards call for CNA to resident ratios of 1:5 during the day, 1:10 during the evening shift and 1:15 for the night shift, plus adjusting staffing based on resident's acuity levels.

If I had only 10 residents to care for I know I could do so much more for my residents. Right now I don't have time to answer call buttons let alone read something to someone or brush their hair the way they like it. Because I wouldn't be as stressed out and rushed like I am now, I would have time to give my residents the focus and - attention they need. With these ratios in place, nurse aides wouldn't be constantly leaving this work because they get fed up.

Through my union I worked to support a bill in the Maryland legislature to institute these new staffing ratios in Maryland. The nursing home industry fought hard against our bill. Even though we had a lot of support, the opposition was too strong. What ended up passing was a compromise bill that sets up task forces to study the problem and make a recommendation to the legislature. I am serving on one of these task forces.

We also need you, our representatives in the federal government to act. This forum is a good first step but what we really need are stronger federal standards that require safe staffing ratios in all nursing homes all over the country.

We also need to make nursing homes more accountability for how they spend government money. Nursing homes should be required to show that they are providing the nurse staffing for the residents for which they are being reimbursed. Congressman Stark was referring earlier to a specific proposal supported by my union and nursing home advocates for how to do this for Medicare. We appreciate your concern about this issue and we look forward to working with you

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I hope the discussion we are having today will lead to action. When I go back to work tomorrow night I want to tell my residents that legislators in Washington care about them and that my trip was worthwhile. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.