

Testimony to the Senate Special Committee on Aging
“The Long-Term Care Workforce: Addressing Shortages and Improving the Profession”
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Thank you, Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Braun, and all members of the Senate Aging committee for this opportunity. It is an honor to share some of my experiences in healthcare with you.

My name is Brooke Vogleman. I’m a mother and licensed practical nurse, and I have been working in long-term care for my entire 15-year career.

I’ve always known that I would be a nurse, and that I would devote my life to helping others. Fortunately, I had incredible people around me who supported my journey. In high school, Ann Alexander (Miss A) was an incredible teacher and mentor. She was a former registered nurse (RN) who helped me become a certified nursing assistant (CNA). In addition to my family, she instilled in me the confidence and knowledge to succeed in my studies.

During my first clinical rotation, we were assigned to care for a specific resident. The assignment sounded easy enough: get to know your resident by learning their past, what their interests are, and their current clinical needs. It was during this exercise that I fell in love with long-term care. I wanted to get to know my patients, build a relationship with them, and ultimately support them in the later stages of their life.

So, directly after high school, I saved my graduation money and obtained my CNA certification through Ivy Tech Community College in Fort Wayne. I then started working in a local long-term care facility. After four years, I wanted to advance in my career. I received a fully paid scholarship for my practical nursing degree through my employer, American Senior Communities. As a licensed practical nurse (LPN), I have taken on several roles, including infection preventionist, unit manager, assistant director of nursing, and staff development coordinator.

Eventually, I became a CNA instructor. For the last two years, I have worked for TLC Management as the Regional Clinical Education Coordinator where I continue to teach tomorrow’s healthcare workforce in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I’m committed to illuminating the pathways for future nurses—like Miss A did for me so many years ago. I’m also working towards obtaining my RN degree, thanks again to a full scholarship from my current employer.

I’ve seen a commitment from the long-term care profession to support practitioners like me. I’ve also seen practitioners come and go for a myriad of reasons. Some moved to other health care settings, while some left health care all together.

I've also seen what happens when long-term care facilities lack workers, resources, and government support, like during the pandemic. Many of my colleagues got burned out and left the profession, forcing facilities to rely on costly temporary staffing agencies.

The long-term care workforce is still struggling to recover to pre-pandemic levels. I've never experienced anyone who doesn't want more staff in our facilities, but there's simply a lack of interested or qualified candidates to meet increasing demand for our aging population.

I'm hopeful that federal policymakers, including the members of this committee, will help us address this challenge through targeted investments, not blanket mandates. I believe it is critical to focus on quality, not quantity.

For instance, LPNs are integral to the interdisciplinary team in long-term care. Staffing mandates that do not include our contributions to patient care or recognize us as nurses are very concerning to me and will have unintended, negative consequences on residents.

Additionally, staffing mandates will force facilities to depend more on expensive staffing agencies. Personally, I'm concerned they will actually increase staff burnout, as current caregivers will be stretched thin and working longer hours in order to comply with these impossible standards.

If facilities still cannot find the workers needed—which is likely since we are facing a caregiver shortage—more facilities will be forced to limit access to care or close their doors completely.

Staffing should be about training, education, and retention. We need workforce development programs that help us grow the care force, incentivize caregivers to choose a career in long term care, and invest in their career development. As a single mom, working full-time, trying to advance in my career, I am grateful to have received this support.

Working in long term care is more than just a job, it is a calling. Our residents become like family, and we need more people to seek out this rewarding profession, which I'm committed to help grow.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to answering your questions today.