

# U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY

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CHAIRMAN Special Committee on Aging

## Chairman Bob Casey's Opening Statement

### *"The Long-Term Care Workforce: Addressing Shortages and Improving the Profession"*

Good morning, everyone. The Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order. I am grateful to welcome all of our witnesses today. Today's hearing is about the direct care workers who provide invaluable long-term care to many of our loved ones all across the country.

Our conversation today is particularly timely given that President Biden recently issued a proclamation declaring this month, the month of April, Care Workers Recognition Month. It would not be a bad idea to do that every month.

Long-term care is intended to provide supports and services to help people live as independently and safely as possible. These services can be provided in various settings, including residential facilities, like nursing homes, or in our own homes. Wherever they are provided, the backbone of these services are of course the professionals who provide these services. These individuals, these Americans are irreplaceable, they are essential, and they are often called to work in this field and love what they do. We wouldn't have long-term care services without the long-term care workforce.

Unfortunately, the workforce that provides this critical care has long been in crisis. Between 50 to over 90 percent of long-term care settings and providers report significant staffing shortages, affecting their ability to provide services, accept new clients, or even to remain open. As we'll hear from some of our witnesses today, so many factors contribute to high turnover and difficulty recruiting a long-term care workforce that can meet the needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and their families. We would not quality long-term care when turnover rates for direct care workers are 40 to 60 percent.

In 2022, the median wage for direct care workers was just above \$15 dollars an hour, just above 15 dollars an hour well below what is paid for warehouse and convenience store jobs. The direct care workforce, the majority of whom are women of color, are more likely to live in poverty compared to the general public.

Many direct care professionals have to work multiple jobs or overtime in order to be able to support themselves and their families. And the jobs often offer few or no benefits, including no paid leave or sick leave. Here is the bottom line if we claim that their work as caregivers is essential, we should accord them the status of a professional

Numerous studies show that insufficient staffing is directly correlated with lower, lower quality of care, worse health outcomes for people receiving long-term care, and increased burdens on family caregivers. Insufficient staffing and high turnover rates also mean longer hours, more strenuous workloads, and increased rates of burnout – further straining the long-term care workforce.

It is time we make the smart choice for families and communities and strengthen our long-term care workforce. That is why I am proud to introduce the Long-Term Care Workforce Support Act. Senators Kaine, who joins us today is with me on that bill and Senator Baldwin as well, along with 23 of our colleagues. This comprehensive bill will make a generational investment in the workforce that will help us care for our loved ones who need support.

This investment is about supporting and empowering the direct care workforce. Specifically, the bill will:

First, provide pathways to enter and be supported in the workforce. Second, improve compensation. Third, ensure that the workforce is treated with respect and provided with a safe working environment and fourth, the bill will provide opportunities to learn from effective recruitment and training strategies that will promote retention.

By professionalizing and supporting the long-term care workforce, we can better recruit and retain professionals in this vital field. This investment is critical, especially when recognizing that our aging population is growing, growing exponentially and many older adults are living with chronic conditions and disabilities.

As a Nation, we must do better for all care workers. And I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today who do this essential work, every day and their own work advocating for better policies and can help us guide our path forward.

Next, I will turn to Ranking Member Braun for his opening statement. Thank you, Ranking Member Braun for your opening statement.

Before we introduce today's witnesses, I would like to turn to my colleague, Senator Kaine from Virginia. Senator Kaine has long been a long-time champion for long-term care and the professionals who provide this care. Throughout our time in Congress, Senator Kaine and I have worked together to address long-term care issues and to ensure that individuals and their families have access to essential long term care services. And I'm proud to have him as a partner on this new legislation, the Long-Term Care Workforce Support Act.