

**Jim Reynolds' Verbal Testimony
Joint Committee on Elder Affairs
7/31/17 Hearing
1PM State House Room A-2
Re: Home Care Licensure Bills**

Thank you for spending what I know is limited legislative time on this important issue.

My name is Jim Reynolds. I am CEO at Connected Home Care, a vendor to six of the Commonwealth's Aging Services Access Points, or ASAPs. We deliver in-home elder care to frail, low-income seniors so they can continue to live at home.

Our home health aides provide services and remove barriers that might prevent a senior from remaining in the home. We help typically with non-medical Activities of Daily Living, or ADLs, that are vital to get through each day but do not require expensive medical care.

Our agency serves primarily the MetroWest and North Shore areas. We employ more than 700 aides and deliver about 60,000 service hours during 20,000 visits each month to more than 1400 active elders. It's a lot to manage! But we all work hard and are proud to assist in this important mission.

Section 1 of H. 350 and S 352 would help provide some relief to our agencies by ensuring that these rates are reviewed annually.

Our inability to offer competitive wages, based upon current ASAP reimbursement rates, dramatically degrades our care delivery. We have demand for 20% more cases than we can fill. We raise wages as high as they can go - even to the point where we literally lose money on some ASAP services. On our long term cases, which we serve at least 42 hours per week and require the best, most expensive aides and more management time, we lose money every service hour. More than 17,000 ASAP service hours per month are money-losers. This is not sustainable.

At our agency, and I do not doubt also at others, we already have an average hourly wage during the week above \$14/hr - and on weekends we pay a \$2/hour premium per hour. Still, we cannot find enough aides to meet our demand. Still, we lose many aides each month to better paying jobs elsewhere. Still, we say No to 20% of the seniors who need our help each day.

Turnover runs at about 40% annually across our industry as aides jump for higher wages at hospitals, or assisted living communities. We hired more than 50 aides in June - but our payroll did not increase. These aides simply replaced departing staff. Even our best offices struggle to get below 30% turnover. Turnover is especially a problem for the Massachusetts seniors we serve: it means less consistency for the elders. New faces appear, which is disorienting for an elder living alone. We spend more time recruiting and training just to replace departed aides. Aides with less tenure and training deliver the care. The lower wages here, compared to the jobs aides leave to fill, mean that we are attracting people lower on

the professional scale, which often means they are less qualified or have less work experience, and may well be more prone to tardiness or truancy.

If I may take a moment here to sing the praises of our aides, I think it is not inappropriate. This is a difficult and often thankless job. Even the best-paid positions do not provide incomes that make for an easy life in the eastern Massachusetts region we serve. Clients can be tough, and the work never stops: we work 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year - during holidays, blizzards, thunderstorms, power outages, and more. Our industry employs many high quality aides with hearts of gold. They deserve a living wage, and we owe to our seniors a workforce who can reliably meet the needs we will all face when our own time comes.

My colleagues in this industry and I understand the challenges the Commonwealth faces. We do not imagine that the existence of this compelling need is matched by a big pot of unused money from which the legislature will fund the required salary increases for home health aides. But we also know that without additional resources, even more Massachusetts elders will fall by the wayside, and that dedicated aides will struggle and jump from job to job trying to support their families. We hope only that as we fund our budget, we remember our parents who raised us and the saints who serve them; that when the time comes to ask ourselves, "How can we afford this?" we answer, "How can we not?"