

I'm Mary Eileen Sorenson, 84, living on Westwood Ridge, Assisted Living Campus, in West St Paul. I am a rather ordinary person. I am not an expert in state budgets reimbursement rates, or waivers. However I am an informed citizen and ask you to listen not just for information but as you would listen to your elderly parents, grandparents, a dear family member or neighbor.

When we move into an assisted living campus, we and family, caregivers, and friends expect competent, and loving service. This is still there from the many staff people who are extraordinary in efforts serving us. However, In October, 2022, 11,000 Minnesotans were turned away because there are not enough staff available.

How would you respond if that was a family member? How would you respond if a staff member, whom your family member had for several years, left because \$17 an hour is not sufficient to provide for a family? How would you like to hear that a family member's Elderly Waiver is not enough to cover costs? How would you respond if rent went up \$230 a month, as it has for me? What is your answer to providers who are doing all they can to give a living wage to staff, and still falling short, and operating in the red?

I want to share a brief story with you. Najib, our housekeeper. When I moved in we had three. Now we have one. The number of residents has not changed. Although I do not need housekeeping yet, there is not a day goes by, that Najib doesn't greet me. I meet him in the halls, in the laundry room, even in the garage while he is disposing of someone's old microwave. He never fails to say "hello Mary."

Even the day I was in tears about a loss of a dear friend. He stopped and listened and simply offered me a bit of his busy time. He tells me of his two children in college and high school. He sometimes talks on Friday of feeling really tired and looking forward to a restful weekend. Najib is family to me and others. He is who takes care of me and your elderly family members because you are not able. He makes up for the time left after your weekly visit to Mom or grandpa..

A few weeks ago, I did not see him at all on Monday. I was surprised at how frightened I was. Was he sick? Did he leave like some others? Was he unhappy here? The next day...happiness. He was back to cleaning the lobby floors. I hugged him and said I was so scared. He said no worry, he would be here always. That's the day I knew he was family.

Najib and others deserve more than \$17/hour. Would any of you work for that and give so much of your time and spirit in a job 24/7? These staff people giving care that you assume will always be there for us. I am here today to **insist** that you begin to address the inequalities of pay. A minimum wage of \$25 should be a given.

The United Nations considers a living wage a human right.

I know there are many deserving of consideration in your budgeting this year. I would just like to remind you, because we do feel forgotten at times. We are your elders. We hold the stories, memories, and life of our communities. We are bearers of the light of wisdom. We need nourishment, attention, and caring.

We live the cycle of life every day. Being elderly can be lonely, fearful, even isolating. At times we feel invisible. Hope becomes fragile. Najib and other staff people keep hope alive for us.

They have a right to a living wage, not just for what they do but for who they are. They are family. Not just for me, but for all of us. Please remember that when you are debating reimbursement rates, and waivers. Thank you