



TESTIMONY TO THE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE

SB 761: Funding for Wage increases for Medical Provider Workers

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

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The League of Women Voters supports **Senate Bill 761: Funding for Wage Increases for Medical Provider Workers**. This bill would require that the scheduled yearly 4% rate increase in reimbursement to medical care providers also be used for wage increases to the health care workers and staff in nursing homes who provide direct care to residents.

The League of Women Voters is fully committed to diversity, equality, and inclusion. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within institutions, **as well as in their distribution of resources**. By taking into account the various advantages and disadvantages that people face, equity works to ensure that every person has an equal opportunity to succeed.

Research has shown that **most of the healthcare workers in long-term care facilities are women of color**, and that their important, difficult, physically-demanding, and, during the pandemic, dangerous work meeting the needs of elderly and disabled people, is deeply undervalued.

Per a 2/24/2022 Washington Post article "*Black Women are Overrepresented and Underpaid in Health Care's Toughest Jobs, Study Shows:*"

*Black women are more overrepresented in health-care jobs than any other demographic groups, **and are concentrated in its lowest-paid and most dangerous roles- disparities that are the products of structural racism and sexism...***

*Within health care, Black women are most likely to work in the long-term-care sector.... **Working in the health-care sector is rife with risks...[and] for Black women, the risks are even higher.** Black women are more likely to work in those nursing homes and other long-term care settings that are most understaffed and under-resourced, leading to greater risk and exposure to injury or infection....*

But while Black women do some of the hardest work in healthcare, their paychecks don't reflect it...

According to research from the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute that was quoted in the article, nursing assistants in nursing homes earned average hourly wages of \$13.90 per hour.

The 2021 federal poverty level for a family of four is \$26,500. Thus, at \$13.90 an hour, a nursing assistant in a long-term care facility would make a yearly salary of \$28,912, or **only 109% of the federal poverty level** for a family of four. This would make it very challenging to pay for housing, food, utilities, clothing, transportation, and other needs.

Senate Bill 761 would mandate a more equitable distribution of the increased reimbursement these facilities will be receiving. Our front-line, essential workers- our healthcare heroes- worked throughout the pandemic at great risk to themselves to care for long-term care residents, enabling them to lead dignified lives. These workers should now receive the increased compensation they need and clearly deserve.

The League urges the committee to give a favorable report to Senate Bill 761.