



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chair Federica Wilson (FL-24)

Joint Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions and Higher Education and Workforce

Investment Hearing

Care for Our Communities: Investing in the Direct Care Workforce

Zoom

Tuesday, July 20, 2021 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Chair DeSaulnier. I want to add my thanks for our distinguished witnesses' time today.

In addition to low pay and difficult working conditions, the direct care sector lacks the training and career pathways that workers need to join—and remain—in this profession.

Direct care is hard work. It is physically and emotionally demanding and also requires knowledge of complex health conditions, such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Yet, training for entry-level direct care workers varies widely and is not reimbursed by Medicaid or Medicare, leaving many workers unprepared to safely provide quality, long-term care.

In addition, these workers often do not have the required education qualifications to enroll in the training programs that would offer professional growth. Without these pathways, direct care workers often become stagnant without the opportunity to advance into higher-paying positions.

In most professions, workers can increase their pay as they increase their skills and experience. Direct care workers should have that same opportunity.

The American Jobs Plan dedicates resources to improve the lives of direct care workers. This mirrors the *Direct CARE Opportunity Act*, which invests in recruiting, retaining, and advancing the direct care workforce pipeline.

These resources will allow states and local organizations to pursue the best solutions in their regions—from training programs and registered apprenticeships to mentorship opportunities—to make direct care a more sustainable career.

Supporting a well-paid and well-trained direct care workforce is vital. It's vital for aging Americans, it's vital for individuals with disabilities.

In 2015, in my home state of Florida, 6,000 people died while waiting for home care services, according to the Department of Elder Affairs. Sadly, this underscores the desperate need for increased investment in the direct care sector.

Strengthening this workforce pipeline is not only the right thing to do to support our nation's direct care workers. It is also the smart thing to do.

With the right investments, the direct care field will be able to offer millions of good-paying jobs with low barriers to entry and ample opportunities for career growth.

As we recover from the pandemic—which erased millions of jobs—enhancing the direct care workforce would help people get back to work *immediately* and secure quality long-term care for those who need it most.

I look forward to our discussions today and I now yield to the Ranking Member, Dr. Murphy, for his opening statement.