



**Testimony for HB1414
Nursing Home Crisis Funding Act of 2026
Position: Favorable**

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Nikki Burroughs, and I am reaching out to you not only as a dedicated healthcare worker with nearly three decades of service, but also as a passionate union delegate for 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East in Baltimore, Maryland. As a mother of three and a grandmother of four, deeply rooted in my community, the crisis unfolding in our long-term and assisted living facilities resonates with me on every level. My 50th birthday this May marks a lifetime committed to caring for others, and I believe it is imperative that I share the stark reality from the front lines with you.

For the past eight years, my vantage point has been the overnight shift – 11:00 PM to 7:00 AM. This "graveyard shift" offers an unvarnished view of the systemic frailties in our elder care system. When staff are critically short, there are no extra hands to call upon, no administrators walking the halls, and no robust support departments to rely on. It is just a handful of caregivers, often operating in isolation, striving against impossible odds to safeguard our most vulnerable residents during the most challenging hours. I've not only delivered direct care but have also taken pride in my role as a preceptor, shaping the next generation of CNAs and nursing students. It is this profound commitment to quality and leadership that compels me to speak out about what I am now witnessing.

We are not merely experiencing a staffing shortage; we are grappling with a dangerous, deeply entrenched staffing crisis across assisted living and long-term care that has, alarmingly, become normalized. Caregivers are routinely assigned an unsustainable number of residents, leading to delayed responses to urgent calls, a distressing rise in preventable incidents, and an environment where serious harm or neglect becomes an ever-present threat. The human cost is immense: workers are stretched beyond their physical and emotional limits, battling a relentless tide of burnout that is no longer occasional, but constant and pervasive. When our experienced caregivers are forced to leave – either by exhaustion or a profound sense of moral injury – facilities hemorrhage invaluable institutional knowledge, mentorship, and stability, directly compromising the quality and continuity of patient care. This creates a devastating cycle that undermines the very foundation of dignified elder care.

This appeal is not an indictment of government; rather, it is an urgent plea to collaborate. We understand the complexities of policy-making, the delicate balance required for budgets and regulations. However, the critical needs of our elderly population and the dedicated workforce caring for them cannot continue to be managed at a perpetual crisis level. The direct correlation between adequate staffing levels, the well-being of our workforce, and positive patient outcomes is undeniable. When caregivers are properly supported and compensated, residents are demonstrably safer, and the quality of care dramatically improves. Stable wages and working conditions are not just about fairness; they are about fostering retention, attracting new talent, and ensuring a stable, experienced workforce for the future.

Therefore, we implore you, Maryland delegation, to champion federal leadership that decisively addresses this public health emergency. We urge you to consider the following critical actions:

* **Implement and enforce robust staffing standards** in long-term care facilities to ensure safe caregiver-to-resident ratios, preventing the current, dangerous understaffing.

* **Mandate greater transparency and accountability** for facilities receiving public funding, safeguarding against the prioritization of profits over people and ensuring resources are directed towards patient care and workforce support.

* **Invest significantly in comprehensive workforce development and retention programs** that not only recruit new caregivers but also support, train, and fairly compensate existing staff, curbing the devastating cycle of burnout and departure.

* **Establish explicit protections for frontline workers** who advocate for safe conditions and quality care, ensuring they can speak out without fear of retaliation.

I have faced resistance and pushback throughout my career, witnessing firsthand how corporate margins too often eclipse human needs. Yet, our resolve remains unshakeable because our residents, our families, and our dedicated workforce deserve far better than the current status quo. This is fundamentally about upholding dignity – for the seniors who built our communities, for their families who trust us with their loved ones, and for the tireless caregivers who form the backbone of this essential sector.

As a mother, a grandmother, a trainer, and a healthcare professional nearing three decades of service, I am asking you to recognize this staffing crisis for the urgent public health imperative it truly is. We stand ready to provide our insights, to collaborate on effective solutions, and to work hand-in-hand to protect the future of long-term care in this nation.

Sincerely,

Nikki Burroughs
Union Delegate, 1199SEIU
Baltimore, Maryland