PHI QUALITY CARE THROUGH QUALITY JOBS

November 2026

Re: Congressional Action to Strengthen the Direct Care Workforce

Dear Members of the 120th Congress,

The strength of our nation's long-term care system depends on the strength of its direct care workforce—yet enduring challenges with direct care wages, training, and career advancement threaten the stability of this workforce, even as demand continues to escalate. PHI calls on the new Congress to lead a coordinated federal strategy to address these issues, build a more stable and well-prepared workforce, and ensure that older adults, people with disabilities, and families are able to access the long-term services and supports they need.

PHI has been working for more than 35 years to advance quality jobs for direct care workers as the foundation of quality care across long-term care settings. As the nation's leading authority on this workforce, we offer extensive research, policy, and practice expertise, and are committed to partnering with you to advance effective solutions in support of this workforce and the millions of Americans that it supports.

The direct care workforce today comprises 5.8 million personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants—making this the largest workforce in our country. Looking ahead, the direct care workforce is expected to add nearly one million new jobs from 2025 through 2035—outpacing all other occupational job growth—and will have an estimated 9.6 million *total* job openings when also accounting for occupational turnover.[1] Yet poor job quality continues to push potential and existing direct care workers into other fields, like retail and fast food, that offer higher wages and other employment benefits. [2] Attracting and retaining a stable workforce will require significant improvements in wages, benefits, training, and career advancement, alongside greater professional recognition and respect for a workforce—one that is predominantly women, people of color, and immigrants—that has long been undervalued.

[1] PHI. "Workforce Data Center." Last modified September 2026. https://phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/.
[2] Kim, Jiyeon. 2024. Competitive Disadvantage: Direct Care Wages Lag Behind—2024 Update. New York, NY: PHI. https://www.phinational.org/resource/competitive-disadvantage-direct-care-wages-are-lagging-behind-2024-update/.

Building a Stronger Direct Care Workforce

Recognizing the need for systemic change, PHI is leading a national effort to reimagine direct care through our Universal Direct Care Workforce Initiative™. Grounded in decades of PHI's research and informed by ongoing demonstration projects in multiple states, this initiative aims to improve job quality, stabilize the workforce, and enhance care access and outcomes across long-term care.[3] The centerpiece of the initiative is a practical model comprising *universal entry-level competencies*, *stackable and portable credentials*, and *integrated career pathways*, all underpinned by *accessible training* and *competitive compensation*. PHI's Universal Direct Care Workforce initiative can provide a framework for coordinated and impactful action by federal leaders.

Priorities for Congressional Action

Specifically, PHI calls on the 120th Congress to advance federal policies and investments that support three priorities:

1. **National direct care workforce standards.** Direct federal agencies to establish national direct care training and credentialing standards and a national compensation strategy that supports livable entry-level employment and incentivizes upskilling and career advancement.
2. **Workforce investment and innovation across states.** Create opportunities and incentives for states to improve direct care workforce training, credentials, career advancement, and compensation.
3. **Supportive employment and immigration policies.** Reinstate or advance policies that protect direct care workers' rights, safety, and well-being, while preserving and expanding pathways for immigrant workers to enter and remain in the workforce.

Key legislation in support of these priorities was introduced during the 119th Congress, including comprehensive proposals like the Long-Term Care Workforce Support Act[4] and the Home and Community-Based Services Access Act[5] as well as targeted policy solutions such as the Fair Wages for Home Care Workers Act,[6] Nurses Belong in Nursing Homes Act,[7] and Careworker Visa Act.[8]

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[3] PHI. 2026. "Universal Direct Care Workforce Initiative." https://www.connectedbycare.org/
[4] Long Term Care Workforce Support Act, H.R, 8541, 119th Congress. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/8541.
[5] HCBS Access Act, H.R. 8540, 119th Congress. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/8540.
[6] Fair Wages for Home Care Workers Act, H.R 7917, 119th Congress https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/7917.
[7] Nurses Belong in Nursing Homes, H.R. 3886, 119th Congress. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/3886.
[8] Careworker Visa Act of 2026, H.R. 9234, 119th Congress. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/9234.

At the same time, major federal policy initiatives—including unprecedented Medicaid cuts, new immigration restrictions and enforcement actions, and the erosion of employment rights and protections[9]—have compounded existing challenges for the direct care workforce. Mitigating the impact of these recent policy changes while building a stronger workforce for the future should be a national—and non-partisan—imperative. We call on all members of Congress to restore Medicaid, support immigrant workers, and reinstate employment rights while advancing longer-term solutions that build on progress to date.

Moving Forward Together

The challenges facing the direct care workforce are longstanding, but not insurmountable—as demonstrated by PHI's Universal Direct Care Workforce Initiative and through many state, local, and employer-led innovations.

PHI will be sharing detailed recommendations for strengthening the direct care workforce and the long-term care system in our forthcoming response to the Senate Finance Committee's Request for Information (RFI). We would welcome the opportunity to share these recommendations with you and your staff as well. To request additional information or arrange a conversation, please contact Amy Robins, Senior Director of Policy, at arobins@phinational.org.

Strengthening the direct care workforce is fundamental to strengthening long-term care in America. We look forward to working with you and other members of Congress to advance policies that recognize the value of direct care workers, improve the quality of their jobs, and ensure quality services for all those who rely on them.

Sincerely,



Jodi M. Sturgeon
President & CEO, PHI

[9] PHI. "Midterm Policy Brief Series: Restore Medicaid; Support Immigrants; Defend Labor Rights."2026. https://www.phinational.org/restore-support-defend-phi-midterm-policy-brief-series-maps-whats-at-stake-for-the-direct-care-workforce/.