PHI QUALITY CARE THROUGH QUALITY JOBS

Direct Care Workforce Talking Points for the Long-Term Care RFI

November 18, 2026

PHI offers these talking points to help you prepare comments in response to the Senate Finance Committee's long-term care (LTC) request for information (RFI).

On October 16, 2026, Senate Finance Committee Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-OR) and his colleagues released an RFI, Delivering An Affordable Home Care Guarantee for American Families. The RFI seeks feedback, data, and policy proposals in three areas:

- **Section I: Make Home Care Affordable and Accessible**—asking how to design, finance, and administer a universal home care benefit.
- **Section II: Improving the Quality of Care in Nursing Homes**—asking how to improve resident care through staffing standards, oversight, and accountability.
- **Section III: Strengthening the LTC Workforce**—asking how to recruit and retain direct care workers through better pay, benefits, training, and career pathways. This section also asks how to protect and invest in immigrant workers and support family caregivers.

Comments Due December 18 by email to homecare@finance.senate.gov.

Talking Points

Section I—Achieving affordable home care requires investing in the workforce that delivers it.

- Congress should protect and strengthen Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS) and invest in the workforce before and throughout the expansion of a home care benefit, especially given that current Medicaid cuts threaten both the services that home care workers provide and the health coverage that many home care workers rely on.[1] Specifically, Congress should **provide sustained and enhanced federal funding** for HCBS, such as by passing and sufficiently funding the HCBS Access Act and the LTC Workforce Support Act.[2]
- Wage improvements are essential to the success of an expanded home care benefit, given that home care workers median wages are just $16.98 an hour—compared with $20.54 in similar occupations—and median annual earnings are less than $24,000.[3] Most home care workers experience economic precarity, with 54 percent relying on public assistance and 39 percent living in low-income households.[4] Therefore, to recruit and retain a sufficient supply of workers, federal investments need to **ensure quality home care jobs**, including fair compensation as well as quality training, respect and recognition, quality supervision and support, and real career opportunities.[5]

- Congress should ensure implementation of the **Medicaid Access Rule**, including its requirements that 80 percent of Medicaid HCBS funding goes to designated home care workers and that states convene advisory groups to engage workers and consumers in Medicaid HCBS rate-setting.[6]
- Congress should secure and enforce the **basic labor protections** for home care workers that are currently under threat, including by codifying minimum wage and overtime protections for home care workers and setting clear standards to prevent employers from misclassifying them as independent contractors.[7]

Section II—Pair nursing home staffing standards with workforce investments.

- Nursing assistants in nursing homes earn a median wage of $20.67 an hour, compared with $27.90 in similar occupations.[8] Livable and competitive wages can help nursing homes retain the experienced workforce that residents depend on, but workers' safety and sustainable workloads *also* require **sufficient staffing levels and quality supervision**.[9]
- Congress should **reinstate enforceable minimum staffing standards** in nursing homes, such as through passing the Nurses Belong in Nursing Homes Act, and pair those requirements with investments in better wages, improved training, and recruitment and retention initiatives.[10] Congress should also require nursing homes to staff above the federal minimum when residents need additional care; should fund inspections and enforcement; and should require transparent reporting on how much Medicare and Medicaid funding goes to direct resident care.

Section III—Build a universal direct care workforce.

- Wage improvements are critical given that median wages for direct care workers are just $17.99 an hour—compared with $20.54 in similar occupations—and median annual earnings are less than $28,500.[11] (Note that these figures are for all direct care workers, compared to the more specific figures for home care workers cited above.) Most direct care workers experience economic precarity, with 45 percent relying on public assistance and 34 percent living in low-income households.[12] To recruit and retain enough direct care workers, federal investments should help **ensure quality jobs for all direct care workers**, including fair compensation as well as quality training, respect and recognition, quality supervision and support, and real career opportunities.[13]
- PHI's **Universal Direct Care Workforce Model™** offers a framework for meaningful and lasting improvements in direct care job quality and service delivery—bringing together universal entry-level competencies, stackable and portable credentials, and integrated career pathways, all underpinned by accessible training infrastructure and competitive compensation.[14]
- Congress should advance the following priorities, including by passing the LTC Workforce Support Act:[15]
    - Establish a **national direct care compensation strategy** and provide sustained funding for state implementation. Use Medicaid rate-setting, wage pass-throughs, and data reporting to hold states and employers accountable for delivering livable and competitive wages and benefits.[16]

    - Create national **core competencies and portable training standards** that improve direct care training while increasing workers' mobility and career options.
    - **Fund state efforts** to improve direct care job quality and support a more universal direct care workforce, including by developing competency-based entry-level and specialized training programs matched by recognized credentials, creating and funding advanced direct care roles, and offering paid training in various modalities and languages, among other efforts.
- Congress should **support the immigrant direct care workers** who help sustain long-term services and supports. Immigrants comprise 28 percent of the direct care workforce, up from 21 percent just a decade ago.[17] Immigration restrictions, mass deportations, and punitive rules aimed at immigrant workers are shrinking the current workforce, slowing the pipeline of new workers, and destabilizing our nation's long-term care system.[18] Congress should reverse these policies and create immigration pathways—such as by passing the Careworker Visa Act—for direct care workers that provide opportunities for permanent status and citizenship, employment portability, and labor protections.[19]

Additional Resources

- PHI's Workforce Data Center
- Direct Care Workers in the United States: Key Facts 2026
- PHI's 5 Pillars of Direct Care Job Quality Framework
- The PHI Universal Direct Care Workforce Initiative
- PHI Policy Briefs: Restore Medicaid, Support Immigrants, and Defend Labor Rights

Notes

[1] PHI. 2026a. *Restore Medicaid*. New York, NY: PHI. https://www.phinational.org/resource/policy-brief-series-restore-medicaid/.

[2] *HCBS Access Act*. 2026. S. 5321, 119th Cong. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/5321; *Long-Term Care Workforce Support Act*. 2026. H.R. 8541, 119th Cong. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/8541.

[3] PHI. 2026b. *Direct Care Workers in the United States: Key Facts 2026*. New York, NY: PHI. https://www.phinational.org/resource/direct-care-workers-in-the-united-states-key-facts-2026/.

[4] PHI, 2026b.

[5] PHI. 2020. *The 5 Pillars of Direct Care Job Quality*. New York, NY: PHI. https://www.phinational.org/resource/the-5-pillars-of-direct-care-job-quality/.

[6] PHI. 2023. "Comments on the Proposed Rule: Ensuring Access to Medicaid Services." June 29. CMS-2442-P. https://downloads.regulations.gov/CMS-2023-0070-0984/attachment_1.pdf.

[7] PHI. 2026c. *Defend Labor Rights*. New York, NY: PHI. https://www.phinational.org/resource/phi-midterm-policy-brief-series-defend-labor-rights/.

[8] PHI, 2026b.

[9] PHI. 2026d. "Comments on Medicare and Medicaid Programs: Repeal of Minimum Staffing Standards for Long-Term Care Facilities." February 2. CMS-3442-IFC. https://www.phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/PHI-Comments-on-NH-Staffing-Standards-IFC-February-2026.pdf.

[10] *Nurses Belong in Nursing Homes Act*. 2026. S. 3886, 119th Cong. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/3886.

[11] PHI, 2026b.

[12] PHI, 2026b.

[13] PHI, 2020.

[14] PHI. n.d. "Universal Direct Care Workforce Initiative." Accessed November 12, 2026. https://www.connectedbycare.org/; Scales, Kezia, Emily Dieppa Colo, and Jodi M. Sturgeon. 2026. "Putting the Pieces Together: A Transformative Vision for the Direct Care Workforce." *Generations Journal*, April 22. https://generations.asaging.org/putting-the-pieces-together/.

[15] *Long-Term Care Workforce Support Act*, 2026.

[16] PHI. 2025. *The Path Forward: Preserving, Strengthening, and Reimagining Care in the United States*. New York, NY: PHI. https://www.phinational.org/resource/the-path-forward-preserving-strengthening-and-reimagining-care-in-the-united-states/.

[17] PHI, 2026b.

[18] PHI. 2026e. *Support Immigrants*. New York, NY: PHI. https://www.phinational.org/resource/phi-midterm-policy-brief-series-support-immigrants/.

[19] *Careworker Visa Act of 2026*. 2026. H.R. 9234, 119th Cong. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/9234.