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## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Advocates Tell Lawmakers Homecare Worker Shortage For Seniors Is Critical Issue Facing State**

**Harrisburg, Pa. (April 10, 2019)** – Pennsylvania has one of the oldest populations in the nation and the number of people over age 80 is rapidly growing, yet the state is not in a position to provide homecare to everyone who needs and wants it. That was the message to members of the House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee today from Vicki Hoak, CEO of the Pennsylvania Homecare Association, Mia Haney, PHA Board President, and Dave Totaro, Chief Government Relations Officer for homecare provider BAYADA.

“Like many others in our industry, we are facing a major employment crisis,” said Totaro. “This crisis stems from our inability to recruit and retain a qualified workforce.” He and Haney, who is president of CareGivers America, which is based in northeast Pennsylvania, said they are challenged to keep qualified workers because of limitations on the wages they can offer. In some cases homecare workers can make more money flipping burgers at McDonalds, said Haney.

Hoak said a main factor why agencies cannot increase homecare worker wages is the unpaid mandates they face, from \$5 child abuse clearance increase, criminal background checks that recently went from \$8 per check to \$22, and a potential FBI clearance that will cost another \$24 per worker if certain legislation passes. She urged lawmakers to include a Medicaid rate increase in the state budget so agencies can increase worker wages.

“With the increasing enrollment of seniors every month into Medicaid – it is now over 1,000 – we must stabilize this provider community and address the issue of better wages for the people who are truly lifelines to thousands of older Pennsylvanians,” she said.

Another reason to pay caregivers more, they said, is that in the end, it saves the state money. The cost of a homecare worker is \$4,315 a month, compared to the cost of nursing home care at \$10,114 a month.

The hearing comes one day after PHA’s 2019 Advocacy Day at the state capitol when more than 300 advocates for seniors and people with disabilities who want to stay at home, told lawmakers homecare workers need a pay increase.

During the advocacy day, Christine Manns, of Washington County, said she works four jobs to make ends meet. But she does not want to give up her direct care worker position because she enjoys the important services she provides to a woman who is in a wheelchair. The turnover rate for homecare workers statewide is nearly 70 percent and the average starting wage is about \$11.40/hour.

Along with asking for an increase in the Medicaid homecare rate, the group also urged lawmakers to:

- Protect seniors at home from abuse by passing amendments to the Older Adult Protective Services Act
- Pass House Bill 51 which would deem individuals eligible for Medicaid-funded in-homecare right away, just like nursing homes are permitted to do, so they can begin receiving care in their homes as soon as possible

Some legislators on the committee said they are frustrated with the eligibility issue and are hearing from constituents who find it difficult to get loved ones into a homecare program.

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