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Good Afternoon members of the Committees. My name is Tanya Beckford and I am a certified nursing Assistant at Newington Rapid Recovery Rehab Center in Newington, Connecticut. I've been a CNA for 23 years. I'm also a proud 1199 delegate, and at the end of the day, I love that 1199 is a fighting union. We are still here making a fuss because we care about our residents and our co-workers and I'd like you to keep that in mind while listening to my testimony.

First, thank you for having me here today to speak about COVID and its impact on Nursing Home residents and workers. This issue is very important because it affects so many Black, brown and white caregivers and working-class and poor residents in Connecticut.

My job is hard. I am proud of what I do serving others with love. But I never thought I would have to survive through a war zone.

Before COVID, we had too many gloves: two to three boxes of gloves in every room, on every unit, every day. When the pandemic hit, we came in one day and the gloves were gone. Then they started giving us two boxes of gloves for each shift for each unit (large and medium size). We had to wash disposable gloves when we came out of a room instead of taking them off and throwing them away.

They only gave us one disposable gown for each day. The gowns were useless. You could blow on the gowns and they would rip. So we started to wear Johnny coats over our clothes and then a plastic garbage bags over it.

I took the first picture that went viral of my co-worker wearing a trash bag. We thought "if we got COVID we are going to die." So we did everything we could with what little supplies we had to protect ourselves and residents. And still, some people died.

The administrators don't care for the residents. If they did, they would give us all the proper PPE. Because if COVID is in the building, then IT IS IN the building. It doesn't matter if you think it's contained in one unit. Because we all are using the same common areas, like the bathrooms, the same staff dining room. It makes no sense.

DPH did not come to inspect before I got sick. If they did ever come for inspections, they should've just popped up at the facilities to inspect at random. But instead, they gave employers advanced notice. At the beginning of the pandemic, our Union found out that DPH wasn't even coming into the facilities to inspect. DPH would use Facetime and call management on the phone. When DPH did start coming inside the buildings to inspect, I never heard of a single worker that was interviewed by surveyors. In fact, in response to my photo of my co-worker wearing a trash bag, DPH's Barbara Cass told the public that we were choosing to wear trash bags, that it was our "preference" to do so.

I'll be honest with you. I get upset hearing the word "hero, hero, hero" being thrown around for us when we're not being treated as such. It felt like we were garbage, forgotten and discarded by the people who were supposed to protect us and our residents.

Despite the use of garbage bags and the little PPE we got, I got sick. I had been running a low-grade fever but the facility was only sending workers home if their temperature reached 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit. Eventually, it got so bad I had to go out sick on April 10. I am diabetic and I am asthmatic. I am STILL recovering from pneumonia caused by the virus. I am not back to normal, three months later. I struggle to gasp air while I'm talking. I used to exercise regularly, and now I have no energy anymore. I have no stamina. I can't walk for a long time. I have to use my breathing machine every day. I'm not sure if I am ever going to get back to normal. No one can tell me how long these effects will last. And those are just the physical effects of this virus.

I can't sleep at night anymore and after 1199's memorial service on June 18th I was rushed to the emergency room because I thought I was having a heart attack. Turns out it was probably a panic attack. I have a lot of different emotions: I am angry, then I'm sad. I don't think I have been able to process how I am feeling yet.

I am terrified about going back to work. My body cannot go through that again. I will not survive if I get sick again. In addition, Management has started telling CNA's that we are bringing the disease in. That it is our fault. The disrespect is unbelievable. They don't call to check up on workers. And they don't care if we can support ourselves while we are out sick. When I got sick, I had 7 sick days and 4 weeks of vacation. And then I had to wait a month and a half to get any kind of pay until workers' compensation kicked in.

If there is a second wave of this virus in Connecticut like everyone says there will be, we need the proper PPE and enough of it. Stockpile it. Make sure there is more than enough PPE, especially for those caring for COVID patients, but honestly for ALL Nursing Home workers. Why are we not a priority over "getting back to normal" and opening for "business as usual"? Some business owners got masks while long-term care workers like me and my co-workers were begging for help.

Workers also need some kind of compensation for this hazardous work. For goodness sake, be humane to us. We are already not making enough money for the work we do. Many of us work multiple full-time jobs. We've all also used up our vacation or sick time now through no fault of our own. Some workers are in debt to their employers because they needed the sick leave to care for themselves or their family members. Does that seem fair to you? Workers risking their lives have gone into debt. That's just inhumane. It's heartbreaking. And I always thought that in Connecticut we were better than that.

Thank you for your time.