

July 14, 2011

The Honorable Tom Udall
United States Senate
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Senator Udall,

As a direct care worker and advocate, I am writing to ask for your commitment to co-sponsor the Direct Care Job Quality Improvement Act in the 122th Congress, Senate Bill 1273. Direct care is one of the fastest growing professions in our nation, and investing in these jobs will help rebuild our national and local economy. This bill will extend wage and overtime protections to home care workers, who have been repeatedly, denied justice under the Fair Labor Standards Act. We provide indispensable care and services to the elderly and individuals living with disabilities. But too often, I see poor working conditions lead to high (50-80%) turnover in this workforce, jeopardizing the quality of care provided to those who need it most.

The Direct Care Job Quality Improvement Act was introduced by Sen. Robert P. Casey, Jr. in the Senate, and Rep. Linda Sanchez in the House. Thus far, Senators Tom Harkin, Kirsten Gillibrand and Bernie Sanders have also signed on as co-sponsors. In addition to extending basic labor protections to home care workers, it will also strengthen data collection and workforce monitoring and improve direct care workforce recruitment and retention by providing grants to states for worker training.

Personal and home care aides are the second fastest-growing occupation both nationally and in New Mexico. Figures from the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that in 2006, there were 21,520 New Mexicans whose primary occupation was nursing assistant, home health aide or personal care/home care aide. Furthermore, annual job openings for these occupations are expected to increase 58 percent between 2006 and 2016. This figure translates to 6,190 *additional* job openings in New Mexico for personal and home care aides by the year 2016, but the direct care industry must be stable enough to support this growth, with competitive wages that make it an attractive option to qualified job-seekers.

Please help us lead the way in New Mexico to provide much needed stability in the long-term care workforce for seniors and the disabled, and equal opportunity for those who care for them by co-sponsoring the Direct Care Job Quality Improvement Act in the Senate this year.

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Thank you for your time, interest and effort on behalf of New Mexico's direct caregivers.



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