



Testimony to the Assembly Committee on Aging and Senior Services
Re: A 1802 / Caregivers Assistance Act
By Cathy Rowe, DrPH
May 9, 2022

Dear Chair McKnight, Vice Chair Tully, and committee members Gove, Sawyer, Speight, Matsikoudis and Jasey,

May I introduce myself, as this is my first time testifying in person to the committee – I may look a little different in 3D than I do on Zoom. My name is Cathy Rowe, and I am the Executive Director of NJ Advocates for Aging Well.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to the committee today on behalf of New Jersey's older adults.

NJAAW supports all three of the bills presented and discussed today. We believe they each are important steps forward in aging policy and in making NJ an age-friendly state and will increase the ability of older residents to age in appropriate settings that meet their needs and the needs of their families – while also showing long-term cost efficiencies that will benefit the state. I will leave the discussion of bills A590 and A1498 to my colleagues and focus on bill A1802, the Caregivers Assistance Act.

First – thank you for including this bill on today's agenda. This act is needed to help the thousands of residents who have taken on the role of caregivers for family members.

As we look at the demographic projections for our state and prepare for an older New Jersey, we must prepare for the support they will need and the support their families need. COVID highlighted this when many families took on the role of caregiver with no training and minimal support.

As you know, an uncountable number of state residents provide informal, uncompensated care and support to elderly relatives. Family caregivers meet a critical need of our aging population by allowing older residents to remain at home and in their communities for longer periods. This reduces the strain on our health systems, our long-term care facilities and saves the state money, while informal caregivers – mostly women – carry the burden themselves. The credit proposed in this bill will provide some

financial relief and shine a light on how many people act as caregivers and how important their role is.

Not only do we have a population bubble with more people reaching the age of 60 or 65 but we have increased longevity. Simply put, more people are older and they are staying older longer. With that will come the need for increased supports. The timing of this bill aligns with a shortage of workers in the direct care workforce. By 2028, we will need to fill more than 150,000 direct care positions in NJ's facilities, not even including the at-home care needs, and we are not yet equipped to do that. This means it is harder now to find home care workers, CNA's and home health aides.

Chair McKnight – I appreciate your recognition of the need for quality workers in this field. At NJAAW, we are forming the Essential Jobs, Essential Care coalition to find strategies to expand and support the direct care workforce. I invite you or members of your staff to join this coalition and will send information to your offices about a meeting on May 23rd and 24th.

My one request for this bill is to increase the income limits to include more people, especially middle class who are not eligible for other benefits and financial support. As we see our demographics shift, we expect more people to assume the role of caregiver which will include people giving up their jobs and work outside of the home in order to provide that care.

I thank you for the amendment that links income to the Elder Economic Security Index, a measurement NJAAW helped bring to NJ several years ago. I hope that we will have the data to look at the number of people who take advantage of this tax credit as well as the increasing need.

I would be happy to take your questions or to discuss this in further details at any time.

Thank you.