

Union urges Congress to support fair wages for NY home care aides

By Jennifer Henderson

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Home Healthcare Workers of America is calling on Congress to take action to support fairer wages for the more than 20,000 home care aides that it represents across New York.

The national union's secretary-treasurer, Lori Ames, testified Thursday before the House subcommittee on the coronavirus crisis that New York's home health care workers are in dire need.

"Every day, while others stayed home during many months of the pandemic, our care workers have gone out and into other people's homes to care for my fellow New Yorkers in need," Ames said.

In New York, about 95% of the patients served are the city's most vulnerable, she said. Much of the care provided is paid for by Medicaid, and reimbursement cuts directly affect wages to caregivers.

The need for home care in New York is only rising as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, which has devastated populations of patients in nursing homes and caused families to reconsider sending loved ones to residential facilities, she added.

"We respectfully ask the honorable members of this subcommittee to realize that the home care workers—the people who are taking care of your parents, siblings, elderly family members and maybe one day you—are putting ourselves at risk while we are making at or around the minimum wage," Ames testified.

The union represents about 10,000 home health care workers who live in Brooklyn, 6,000 in the Bronx, 3,500 in Queens, 2,000 in Manhattan and 500 on Staten Island, the union said.

Ames concluded her testimony by noting that home care aides have long been overlooked by society, and the underfunded industry is in desperate need of federal support.

"Our work not only gives our patients a better quality of life when compared to nursing homes," Ames said, "but it also saves the Medicare system tens of billions of dollars annually while continually showing better patient health outcomes." —J.H.