



April 23, 2024

Honorable Bob Casey, Chairman
U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging
G41 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Mike Braun, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging
628 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Casey and Ranking Member Braun:

The American Seniors Housing Association (ASHA) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record regarding the Senate Aging Committee's recent hearing, *The Long-Term Care Workforce: Addressing Shortages and Improving the Profession*.

ASHA is a national organization of over 500 senior living companies who own, operate or provide services to approximately 7,000 senior living communities across the U.S., including active adult, independent living, assisted living, memory care and life plan/continuing care retirement communities. Our members' communities serve a wide range of seniors, from those who require very little assistance with activities of daily living (ADL) such as eating, bathing, and dressing to those with significant needs associated with Alzheimer's disease and related forms of dementia. The Association's programs are focused on promoting quality and innovation, advancing research, exchanging strategic business information, and educating seniors and their families about the merits of senior living.

The topic of this hearing, the long-term care workforce, is a top priority for ASHA. The workers who support older adults living in senior living communities across the country are the backbone of these caregiving operations. The work they do is crucial, and without a steady and adequate supply of caregivers, nurse assistants, medication technicians, housekeepers, servers, and the many more essential workers who provide care for our aging population, there will be fewer options for care when we need it most. As we face the needs of an ageing population, one in which people are living longer and with more chronic conditions, it is imperative that we have the workforce in place to meet these needs.

As you and the members of this committee consider proposals to address these shortages, it is critical that you take a broad view on policy needs to ensure we have an adequate pipeline of workers by creating and granting access to training tools, grant programs, and other resources to be successful in the long-term care sector. This also includes consideration and action on immigration policies to allow foreign workers who are willing, able, and compassionate about caring for older adults, to work in this country.

Senior living plays a significant role in the greater health care system and these workers are key to maintaining the health and wellbeing of the residents they serve, thereby reducing the need for more critical services or hospitalization. When residents are safe, the overall health care system benefits.

America Has a Labor Shortage and the Impact is More Profound in Senior Living and Long-Term Care Communities

As this committee fully understands, the long-term care industry is facing an unprecedented shortage of workers. This shortage has been exacerbated by COVID-19, which wreaked havoc on the industry and our members continue to work hard to recover. The headwinds persist but the industry must position itself to prepare for the groundswell of baby boomers who will need service enriched housing in the next decade. The current worker shortage must be addressed not only with private market strategies to recruit, train, and retain employees in more creative ways, but by government policies as well.

These are hard jobs but very rewarding and meaningful. They are best suited for those with a passion for serving older Americans. Without these caregivers, our seniors will suffer. The dedicated caregiver in our senior living communities are the unsung heroes of the American workforce.

The Aging Population Demands a Stable and Adequate Workforce

By 2040, one in five people will be 65 or older. We are a rapidly aging population; advances in medicine and technology are allowing people to live longer. However, there are serious implications to those advancements that must be considered such as increased health care costs, social security uncertainty, the workforce and the overall health of the economy.

The demand projections for long term care in all settings (Assisted Living, Nursing Homes, Home Health Care) is astonishing. An estimated 4.6 million paid direct caregivers are working today in home care, residential care homes such as assisted living, and nursing homes.

Employment of home health and personal care aides is projected to grow 25 percent from 2020 to 2030 and reach a need for almost 8 million workers. This data coupled with the current shortage and projected need for workers to meet this need, should elicit a call to action for policymakers and industry alike.

Federal Workforce Development Policies

Workforce development programs at the federal, state and local level as well as those offered by employers in the long-term care industry are necessary components in preparing individuals to fill the growing demand for essential workers, especially the direct caregiver workforce. The recent introduction of the Long-Term Care Workforce Support Act, introduced by Chairman Casey (D-PA), Senator Baldwin (D-WI) and Senator Kaine (D-VA), prioritizes the need for such programs as the industry and country faces the real risk of not having enough available and willing workers to keep pace with the growing demand for their services.

This important legislation makes a significant investment in workforce development and training grant programs to be offered at the state level, offering a wide range of worker supports, skills training, demonstration projects, technical assistance as well as worker protections. It covers targeted populations for special focus i.e. rural and low income, those who need assistance with basic skills development, as well as the creation of a national Technical Assistance Center. Wage

subsidies, loan forgiveness, affordable childcare, workplace transportation, and other financial assistance are also important incentives to individuals who choose to serve and care for older adults. We will continue to seek opportunities to connect trained workers who take advantage of these programs with career opportunities in senior living communities.

Given the immediate need to secure workers, we believe prioritization should be given to grant programs that will result in an efficient yet effective approach to growing the workforce sooner than later.

Other legislative proposals that are noteworthy include:

- *Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act.* This bill would extend the use of Pell grants to fund training programs as short as eight weeks. The restriction of the grants to mostly two- and four-year college degrees has made short-term skills training programs unaffordable for people in lower-income brackets.
- *The Improve and Enhance the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Act.* WOTC is a federal tax credit available to employers for hiring and employing individuals from certain targeted groups who have faced significant barriers to employment, but it is in need of an update due to its erosion in value and effectiveness

We support workforce development grant programs as critical resources to building a supply of caregivers and other essential workers in the long-term care field but efforts to understand how existing programs have succeeded in growing the workforce as well as the impact on wages and career path development, will inform future programs. Job corps, apprenticeship programs, community college programs and much more should be inventoried and evaluated for effectiveness, efficiency and quality. It is important that effective programs tailored to meet the needs of the long-term care worker are extended and enhanced while new programs are created to meet the growing need. Efforts should include identifying innovative models that work and scale them as well as fostering new learning models.

Immigration Reform Must be in the Mix of Solutions

While employers must respond to the demands of the workforce for higher wages, benefits and flexibility, policymakers also have a responsibility to respond to the lack of workers in this country and the broken immigration system that perpetuates the problem. There are simply not enough native-born workers to meet the current and future demand and left unresolved will ultimately impact the ability to care for older adults. It is time to look beyond our borders and give immigration reform serious attention.

There are numerous nonimmigrant visa categories for people traveling and working in the U.S. but none of them are suited for the caregiver, dietary aid, med tech and other critical positions in the long-term care industry. It is time that immigration reform be given the attention it deserves as a means of not only meeting the senior care workforce needs but to strengthen our overall economy.

ASHA encourages support for the following measures:

- Create a visa category for the front-line, in demand long term care worker,
- Improve employment authorization for migrants who apply for asylum,
- Expedite processing of work applications for those in the U.S. and are in a status that allows them to work but are unable because of delays at DHS that are taking in some cases 8-12 months. This includes asylum applicants, and those with humanitarian paroles and temporary protected status,
- Create a pilot program within the existing H2-B visa category for same worker,
- Include long term care workers in future allocation of unused “green cards,”
- Grant DACA recipients, Afghans with Humanitarian Parole and TPS workers permanent legal status, and
- Establish pilot programs to assess effectiveness of creating visa programs for essential workers that are in great demand and kept business and health care systems afloat during the pandemic.

We understand the need to couple border security with legal immigration reform. We support efforts to address both challenges. However, there are thousands of people that are here in the U.S. awaiting work authorization that can be put to work today. Therefore, in addition to legislative action, we urge you to seek administrative remedies to expedite work authorization documents for those who are currently eligible.

DOL Shortage List: ASHA wrote to the Department of Labor (DOL) re: the Shortage Occupation List, Schedule A. (20 C.F.R. § 656.5). As you are aware, Schedule A was designed to provide a regularly updated, data-driven list of occupations that are experiencing labor shortages. Employers hiring in Schedule A occupations may more easily bring foreign workers permanently to the United States to fill those jobs. However, Schedule A has not been updated in decades and currently includes only physical therapists and nurses. Schedule A needs to be reformed to include senior living front line workers and used as an innovative way to attract talent to critical shortage occupations.

Immigration Reform Is Good for the Economy

Congress will have to address the broken immigration system and the sooner it does the better for our seniors. Although government programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid have helped reduce poverty and improve the health of the older population, current projections indicate that these programs—as currently implemented—are not sustainable. Immigration fuels the economy. The last serious attempt at reform was in 2013 when the Senate passed S. 744 - the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act. When immigrants enter the labor force, they increase the productive capacity of the economy and raise GDP. In *The Economic and Budgetary Effects of Immigration Reform: S. 744 Revisited*, Douglas Holtz-Eakin, President, American Action Forum translates CBO’s projected impacts of S. 744 from 2013 to the 2024-2033 budget window, and in his analysis found that:

The population would increase by 3 percent over 10 years, the labor force would be 3.5 percent larger, the capitol stock would increase by 2 percent, productivity would increase 0.7 percent and

GDP would be up 3.3 percent, indicating that reform would have broad benefits for labor force growth, employment, economic output, and the federal budget.

The Work Ahead

Throughout the pandemic, long term care, front line, essential workers have proven themselves to be a truly important part of our nation's critical infrastructure and crucial part of the backbone of our society. It is clear we need to increase the number of workers to care for our seniors. There are many talented immigrants who are willing to enter the senior living or other long-term care sector but are faced with insurmountable roadblocks. These workers should be given the opportunity to make a career, a good living and a difference in their own lives and the lives of others. If we are to meet the expectations set for us, policymakers must act now to expand access to new pools of staff and take steps to encourage employment in long-term care.

Without care providers, the U.S. cannot responsibly care for its seniors. We look forward to working with you on this critically important issue. Please reach out to ASHA's Vice President of Government Affairs, Jeanne McGlynn Delgado at jeanne@ashaliving.org with questions or comments.

Thank you.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Schless".

David Schless
President & CEO