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Testimony for the Frontline Worker Pay Working Group

9/2/2021

Good afternoon – my name is Arlan Swanson, I am the Administrator and CEO for Maple Lawn Senior Care. We are a not-for-profit provider of nursing home and assisted living services here on our campus at Fulda, in Southwest MN. We are the only nursing home in Murray County. Our workforce of 100 employees cares for about 80 residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak briefly on the importance of recognizing long-term care and assisted living staff members - who have worked diligently caring for Minnesota seniors during this extended pandemic.

Imagine with me that you are Melissa (one of our nursing assistants with small children at home) - Every day that you come to work, you must wear a mask and goggles for 8 hours or more – you are caring for 10 elderly resident's most personal needs, **like** a visit to the bathroom, getting them dressed, making their bed, assisting them with meals, and attempting to provide individualized care.

On some occasions you are even caring for someone who is COVID positive and so you are completely gowning and wearing a respirator mask. Plus, you are now doing this work on a double-shift or 10 days in a row because you are willing to pick up extra shifts - as you feel responsible and there are not enough workers to fill the shifts.

If you can imagine this, you will be able to understand some of what our caregivers have endured for 18 months and continue to endure today. They are picking up shifts they don't want to work, finding daycare that doesn't exist and writing employee schedules that are full of holes. They are attending continuous virtual update meetings by MDH, CDC, CMS, OSHA, and other agencies who are providing often conflicting guidance. They are calling families to explain – once again – the protocols for visitors, essential caregivers, outdoor visits, and indoor visits. They hold the hands of residents who are unable to receive a visitor. They are holding the hand of a resident who is at the end of life. They are trying to do social distancing activities in a world where resident's long for touch and comfort.

In the past week staff had to explain the options to a resident who wanted to go off campus to have what could be her final photo with family members. Upon return to the nursing home there may be extra testing and a possible quarantine. She chose to skip the photo, but it was a heartbreaking decision for the residents and staff who worked with the family – this used to be a simple decision.

Another difficult decision we make constantly . . . when is our staffing adequate to admit new residents? Because of the continuing staffing crisis, these have also been painful decisions. It is not easy to turn down someone who needs care in your community because you do not have the staff resources to meet their needs.

Our staff are **Heroes** plain and simple. They have met the challenge and are physically and emotionally worn out. It is sad now for me to hear a staff member begin to wonder out loud if they have made a poor career choice. They all need extended paid vacations to recover – and sadly that is not feasible because there is no one to replace them.

We are **so** thankful now that the MN legislature has allocated funds to recognize the work of these critical workers – those who have saved lives by standing in the gap – holding back the pandemic's worst ravages on our seniors.

I am so proud of our team and how they have ridden the waves of this COVID sea. Yes, some members of the crew have washed overboard but most have stayed to man the sails. I am convinced that a significant and tangible gift would be a **very welcome thank you** for all they have done. It would serve as a lighthouse if you will to the tired and worn.

In terms of process – I would suggest a direct check from MN would be most meaningful way to express thanks. This method- would help the gift to stand out as being from the gracious and thankful people of Minnesota.

Thank you,

Arlan Swanson

Arlan Swanson, HSE
Administrator/CEO