

Good Morning Chairwoman Ward, Chairwoman Brooks, Chairwoman Collette, Chairman Haywood and members of the Senate Aging & Youth Committee and Health & Human Services Committee. Thank you for your interest in senior care and having me here to share my story today.

My name is Claire Rodriguez and I am a LPN working on the dementia wing at Homestead Village Enhanced Living. I began working there in August 2016 in the kitchen with Care Up. My favorite part of working was my interaction with the residents. It is what made me love to come to work. My mother was a nurse and I always had an interest in nursing, so while working in the kitchen I took the certification course to become a CNA and began working in that capacity. As I was working as a CNA I continued my education and training to become a LPN at Lancaster County Career & Technical School and graduated in April of 2019.

As an LPN, I can give medication; I give necessary treatments and care for our residents, whatever they may need. Our residents aren't the people I work for, they are the people I care for. Many feel like family to me.

In April, we had the first COVID -19 positive case on the dementia unit and it sadly did spread from there. Initially we were wearing masks but they weren't the N95. The Department of Health has helped with supplying PPE and now I have 2 gowns waiting for me daily and I do have an N95 mask which I wear for about a week then dispose of. Before entering the unit, I wear a gown and when entering treatment rooms I wear an additional gown and a face shield.

Right before the middle of April, after we had our first case, I woke up with a terrible migraine, I felt dizzy and terrible although I never did get a fever. I lost my sense of taste and smell as well as my desire to eat and drink. I was tested and it took about 4 days for the test results to come back confirming that I had COVID-19. For about a week I felt really bad and I understood how residents with the virus said they couldn't eat or drink as I felt the same way. Thankfully, I recovered and I continued to isolate for the two week period and now I am back at work.

The road to caring my residents, who are my friends, who are COVID positive, has been rocky. Many patients have lived at the community for years, so I really know them and to see them decline is heartbreaking for me. I have even become close with their families. I have a resident that died a few weeks ago whose family still calls me. We can share the pain together. Many days I sit with patients who are critically ill and just encourage them to keep fighting, that they can beat this. I hold their hands and cry. While families are permitted to come in during end of life situations, many family members have health issues that prevent them from coming in the room with someone who is COVID positive. They spend time right outside the room and watch as I try to share their love with their family member.

My job is always challenging and it requires that I come to work ready to do whatever it takes for our residents. It should be no secret that giving care is tough. COVID has made this so much tougher. We have lost residents and I can cry but I need to keep going because others need me to. Caring for our seniors is a great responsibility and privilege, and it has been made more difficult with COVID-19.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today.