



February 19, 2020

Written testimony of Kimberly Carlson, Administrator, Bayview Health Care, Concerning the Governor's Recommended FY 2020 and FY 2021 Proposed Budget

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and to the members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kimberly Carlson. I am the Administrator at Bayview Health Care in Waterford, Connecticut. Bayview Health Care has been providing nursing home care in our community for the past 30 years. We are a 127 bed nursing home to include a 37 bed dementia unit, and we have 233 employees working at our Athena home.

To begin, I want you to know how proud I am to be here with some of the key people from Athena Health Care Systems. As the Administrator of Bayview Health Care, our devoted staff does an amazing job in providing the highest quality of life for all our residents no matter what their payer source. We pride ourselves on maintaining a 96% average census due to the excellent care we provide. We were most recently recognized for achieving ACHA's Quality Initiative Recognition Program for Antipsychotics and Functional Outcomes.

Thank you to the Appropriations Committee for supporting increases in last session's budget for nursing home wage and benefit increases for our employees. According to the publication dated August. 15, 2019 from the website <https://elderlawcenterbrevard.com/2019/08/15/u-s-facing-nursing-home-staffing-shortage>, Courtney Bishnoi, Vice President of Quality and Programs at AHCA stated "There is no question that the long-term care profession, along with the health care providers across the spectrum, are facing a crisis" Recruiting and retaining nursing staff in Connecticut's very competitive labor market continues to be a major challenge. Please know these wage enhancement dollars will help in this ongoing struggle to assure quality care in our nursing home and it certainly is a struggle.

According to data from the CT. gov state website, there were 14 nursing home closures in 2016 until June of 2018 resulting in a loss of 1,617 beds. Medicaid being the highest payment source for nursing homes. If nursing homes are unable to sustain the financial impact of the rising costs of healthcare due to expensive medications, the minimum wage increasing to \$15 per hour, the complexity of clinical care needed to include: the rise of dementia and Alzheimer's disease, substance abuse and behavioral health needs. What will happen to those folks who rely on state funded Medicaid as their only payer source to obtain skilled nursing care. Who will care for our families, even ourselves as we age.

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Growing up the thought of becoming a nursing home Administrator never crossed my mind. I graduated with a major in English in 1992. It wasn't until 2004, that I stumbled upon healthcare when I was offered a position as a Community Life Services Director of a continuing care retirement community that did not accept Medicaid as a payer source. During my 10 years in this position, I saw 7 administrators come and go in our health center. I identified the growing need for stability and compassion that an Administrator needs to be able to offer and decided that I needed to be the person to effect change and pursue obtaining my Administrator's license. Whoa, what an eye opener it was when I became an Administrator to another side of life I had never seen before of people who were reliant on Medicaid dollars and how due to a minimal amount of Medicaid funding to cover costs to operate a nursing home, how it impacted their quality of life. Stability, compassion, yes I can offer these attributes, but food, water, electricity, labor costs, physical plant, housekeeping, social services, therapy to a name a few costs all came out of the Medicaid daily rate. Again, how can nursing homes continue to sustain the increasing care costs?

I fear that our nursing home continues to be at a crossroads in 2020. Major changes are being developed called "Case Mix" will change the way Medicaid reimburses our nursing home this year. While we in concept agree with Case Mix and how it reimburses nursing homes base on the care needs, or acuity, of the residents, our nursing home is afraid that the new Case Mix payments will ignore the Medicaid funding shortfalls of the past decade, and that quality will suffer with insufficient resources.

Policy makers need to know delivering the care everyone wants for their loved ones is getting harder and harder to provide in Connecticut. Our employees know this very well. The reason isn't really hard to understand—there has been almost no additional Medicaid help in the state budget for now over a decade, but the nursing home population is older and sicker than it was twenty years ago. Case Mix could be an answer, but only if the funding shortfall is addressed.

As a nursing home Administrator, I am passionate about and have a responsibility as do the policy makers to ensure that the needs of our Connecticut residents at large are afforded the opportunity for skilled nursing care.

Please help us deliver the care we all want and please make long overdue nursing home funding a priority in this year's budget.

On behalf of everyone at Bayview Health Care, thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.