



February 19, 2020

*Written testimony of James Christofori, Administrator, at Fresh River Healthcare in East Windsor  
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 James Christofori. I am the Administrator at Fresh River Healthcare in East Windsor, Connecticut. Fresh River Healthcare has been providing nursing home care in our community for 45 years. We are a 140-bed nursing home, and we have 168 employees working at our facility.

I want to begin by thanking the Appropriations Committee for supporting increases in last session's budget for nursing home wage and benefit increases for our employees. Recruiting and retaining workers in Connecticut's very competitive labor market remains one of our major challenges. Having an ample supply of workers to meet the needs of nursing home residents with increasing care needs on all shifts will even be more challenging as the Connecticut minimum wage continue to rise. Please know these new wage enhancement dollars will help in this ongoing struggle to assure quality care in our nursing home.

In this regard, I want you to know how proud I am to be here with some of the key people from Fresh River Healthcare. I'm the Administrator, but these devoted caregivers, from [RNs, LPNs, CNAs, etc...] all want what I want----that is to deliver the highest quality care experience to anyone who comes to Fresh River Healthcare. And these workers are doing an amazing job, and I am so grateful to them, and proud of them, for everything they are doing. In addition, Fresh River Healthcare is proud to have the only Huntington's Disease program in the state of Connecticut and partner with the UCONN Health HD program. The UCONN Health HD program assists our staff in developing expertise in caring for the long-term care needs of this distinct group of individuals. Their care needs in general are a higher acuity of care than the average nursing home resident. This is often reflected in substantial assistance in their Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), such as bathing, toileting, dressing and meal intake. Given the specialization of the program, Fresh River has admitted residents from all over the state of Connecticut as well as nursing homes from all over New England.

My fear is that the Case Mix system will adversely affect our ability to provide the necessary care to meet their needs on a daily basis in a resident population that is most vulnerable.

I fear that our nursing home continues to be at a critical juncture 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.

This Case Mix matter is of particular importance to me and my nursing facility because we are 96 percent occupied with a 97% of patients on State Medicaid. Many of my residents suffer from medical problems that are combined with either behavioral health or substance use issues. It’s important that whatever system is implemented provides adequate reimbursement for efficient high occupancy and high Medicaid utilization nursing facilities and appropriately reimburses for patients with behavioral health or substance use issues. I know other States like right over the border in Massachusetts have implemented special reimbursement for high occupancy, high Medicaid utilization and Behavioral Health to ensure access to appropriate care. It is my understanding that the system being developed by Connecticut does not have a way of properly scoring or tracking residents with behavioral or substance use issues. This flaw will lead to cutting rates for this vulnerable population unless it is addressed.

Please help us deliver the care we all want and please make long overdue nursing home funding and well-designed Case Mix a priority in this year’s budget.

On behalf of everyone at Fresh River Healthcare, thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted

James Christofori

James Christofori, Administrator

February 17, 2020