



February 19, 2020

*Written testimony of Sawyer Thornton, Administrator, Sharon Health Care Center 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 Sawyer Thornton. I am Administrator at Sharon Health Care Center in Sharon, Connecticut. Sharon Health Care Center has been providing nursing home care in our community for 27 years. We are an 88-bed skilled nursing facility, and we have 137 employees.

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. In my small north west corner of Connecticut, it has become increasingly challenging to retain staff. With cost of living rising and numerous younger people leaving the area, I have a hard time recruiting staff. I personally live in the area I work, and I see the effects. When I attended to elementary school in the area my class was 26, now looking at the same school they have a class total of 14, this is just an example of less young people living in Connecticut as well as Litchfield County. Litchfield county has the largest older population in Connecticut with few people to find as care givers. 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 Sharon Health Care Center. I'm the administrator, but these devoted caregivers, from RNs, LPNs, CNAs, Housekeepers, Recreation, Therapy, Maintenance, and Dietary all want what I want----that is to deliver the

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highest quality care experience to anyone who comes to Sharon Health Care Center. We all come together to work as a team and take pride in doing so. These workers are doing an amazing job, and I am so grateful to them, and proud of them, for everything they are doing. We have a large secured dementia unit at Sharon and we take pride in what we do. We have changed around our unit for the better so that it is very unique and helps to meet our residents where ever they are in their dementia. It is their home and we make it so that it looks and feels like a home to them as much as possible. Sharon Health Care walks annually in the Walk to end Alzheimer's as well as helps to fundraise for the cause, because we know how tough it is for residents and families to deal with this horrible disease.

Additionally, we take high acuity residents with needs such as dialysis, trach care, and wound care, and these residents needs can be costly. These residents need somewhere to go, and we are the ones that end up caring for them and making them most comfortable. We are happy to care for these residents and take pride in being able to care for such a high acuity resident, but the reimbursement should reflect the care.

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.

Legislators 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 really isn't 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. We see so much more dementia

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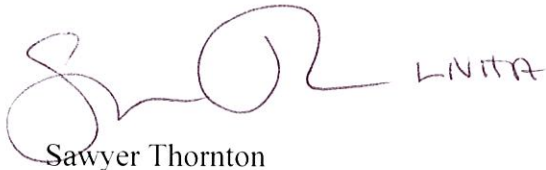
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and Alzheimer's disease than ever before. Today's nursing home residents also have greater behavioral health needs----mental health and substance use disorders are common on top of the skilled nursing care that today's nursing home residents need. Case Mix could be an answer, but only if the funding shortfall is addressed.

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 Sharon Health Care Center, thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



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