



## TESTIMONY

Submitted by Nicole Hernandez, Administrator/Area Director  
Aveanna Healthcare

Appropriations Committee – Human Services Budget  
Public Hearing

**February 19, 2020**

### **Regarding the Governor's Budget for Human Services**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Nicole Hernandez. I am the Administrator and Area Director for Aveanna Healthcare (previously PSA Healthcare). I have my Bachelors in Healthcare Administration and have spent the last 20 years in the Home Care arena of Healthcare.

Aveanna Healthcare is a licensed home care agency and member of the Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home. Aveanna has been a leading provider of pediatric homecare services for medically fragile children in Connecticut for over 20 years. Our focus is providing professional, high quality continuous skilled nursing by highly trained skilled caregivers to this medically fragile pediatric population. Our services cover all eight counties in Connecticut. Approximately 74% of the Pediatric population we serve receive benefits from Medicaid or Medicaid waiver programs.

Aveanna urges the legislature to increase the reimbursement rates for Home Continuous Skilled Nursing. The need for continuous skilled nursing care for these medically fragile patients has heightened in the wake of the increase in advances of bio-medical engineering and technology. These advancements are preserving life where, previously certain disease states often meant the loss of life. These patients have complex medical diagnoses and many of whom require life sustaining equipment for survival and are discharged from Pediatric Intensive Care Units into their homes. Many of them require feeding tubes for nutrition, tracheostomy tubes to maintain a patent airway and ventilators to assist them to breathe.

At any given time there are on average 30 medically fragile patients in an ICU setting waiting to come home. According to the 2003 Feasibility Study of a Project of Supportive Housing Families of Children with Complex Medical Conditions: Children staying in the hospital long after they were medically appropriate for discharge to home, because their families could not arrange consistent skilled nursing care at home. Without access to continuous skilled nursing care, it would be necessary for these patients to be transferred to an acute or chronic disease hospital or the patient might remain home unsafely without proper care. Transfer to a hospital

setting would not be consistent with state and federal initiatives that promote home and community based supportive living for persons with medically complex needs.

The shortage of at-home continuous skilled nurses and the ability to pay those nurses appropriately are just a few reasons these children often spend months in the hospital before being discharged to home. A challenge for Home Care Agencies who care for these One children who have complex medical diagnosis and many of whom require life-sustaining equipment for survival is to recruit and retain appropriately. The cost to care for a medically fragile pediatric patient 23 hours a day is approximately \$1,078. The cost to care for that same patient in an Intensive Care Unit of a hospital is \$9,100. Bringing and keeping these children home is a savings vehicle for the state of CT and can reduce Medicaid costs by about \$100,000,000 per year.

By increasing Medicaid rates for the Continuous Care community would allow for agencies, to hire, train and retain the highly skilled nurses needed to care for this very fragile population, and close the gap in the access to care disparity.

Thank you for considering our request.

I'm available for any questions, Nicole Hernandez [nhernandez@aveanna.com](mailto:nhernandez@aveanna.com).