



February 19, 2020

Written testimony of Marisa Jones, Administrator, Valerie Manor 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 Marisa Jones. I have been the Administrator at Valerie Manor Health Care Center in Torrington, Connecticut for the past 6 ½ years. Valerie Manor is a longstanding provider of nursing care in the community of Torrington with 151 skilled beds and 200 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 our very competitive labor market remains one of the major challenges. Having an adequate supply of workers to meet the needs of our nursing home residents with increasing care needs will even be more challenging as the Connecticut minimum wage continues 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 Athena Health Care Systems. As an Administrator, I am not only speaking for myself but also for our devoted caregivers. We all strive to produce the same results, and that is to deliver the highest quality of care to anyone who comes to Valerie Manor. These workers and all those currently caring for our most vulnerable population are doing an amazing job, and I am so grateful to them for everything they do. We have earned a 4 star quality rating through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid which speaks to our above average quality of care despite the challenges.

I fear that our nursing home is facing a critical juncture in 2020. DSS is currently making the biggest change to nursing home rates in 30 years called "case mix". This new reimbursement structure will fail if we don't address the accumulated funding shortfall from the last decade---some \$125 million in lost

appropriations. If case mix includes quality incentive payments, then that must be new money, or it simply comes from the funding that is already short. While we agree, in concept, with Case Mix and how it reimburses nursing homes based 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 due to insufficient resources.

Elected leaders 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, unfortunately. 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. We see much more dementia and Alzheimer's disease than ever before. Today's nursing home resident also has greater behavioral health needs-----mental health and substance use disorders are common on top of the typical skilled nursing care needs. 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 Valerie Manor, thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.