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Written testimony of Lara Alatise, Owner, Administrator, Windsor Health and Rehabilitation Center, 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 Lara Alatise. I am the Owner, Administrator at Windsor Health and Rehabilitation Center, Connecticut. I have been a licensed Nursing Administrator for over 20 years. I have been providing nursing home care in our Windsor community for 4 years. We are a 108-nursing home, and we have over 125 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 of Windsor Health and Rehabilitation Center. Although I am the Owner and the day to day Administrator, I will not be standing here without our devoted caregivers, from RNs, LPNs, CNAs, to Housekeepers, Dietary staff and all the service workers who day to day, 24/, who are dedicated to delivering the highest quality care experience to anyone who comes us for care. And these workers are doing an amazing job, and I am so grateful to them, and proud of them, for everything they are doing. Our facility was featured as a success story by New England Quality Improvement Organization in 2017. In 2019, we were also the recipient of the Blue Award for Quality by the New England Nursing Home Quality Care Collaborative. As the facility leader, I was recognized by the

American College of Healthcare Administrator for organizational leadership in 2019. All of these does not happen in vacuum. It takes the dedication and commitment of staff who see that the care of our patient becomes their priority even when they have their own challenges to take care of. When you see that patient, who has come to us bed-bound and able to have positive outcome and return home, because of the quality care they have been given, we are joyful. Or a patient who I call 'Bruce' who came to us as double amputee a year ago, today is a volunteer at our facility, have been fitted with prosthetics legs, discharged to the community and return to us walking around helping other patients.

I fear that our nursing home continues to be at a critical turning point 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. We are being asked to give so much with decline in reimbursement while we expect to increase staff wages and improve our physical environment and overall environment of care.

Policy makers and 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. 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 so much more dementia and Alzheimer's disease than ever before. Today's nursing home resident 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 Windsor Health and Rehabilitation Center thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.