



**Public Health Committee
House Bill 6666
March 29, 2021**

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Director of Public Affairs
VITAS Healthcare®**

VITAS Healthcare (pronounced VEE-tahs), would like to thank the Department of Public Health for at long last establishing a hospice licensure category in the State of Connecticut. We support HB 6666, *An Act Concerning the Department of Public Health's Recommendations Regarding Various Revisions to the Public Health Statutes* for including this change. VITAS has advocated for hospice specific regulations since it accepted its first Connecticut hospice patient in 2004.

Currently, Connecticut is the only state in the nation that requires hospice providers to be licensed and follow the regulations, standards and ratios created for home health agencies. Having a hospice regulatory category is necessary for terminally-ill patients and their families because it will dramatically improve the care offered by hospice providers.

VITAS is eager to work with stakeholders to increase the quality of hospice care provided in Connecticut. We will advocate for a framework that ensures appropriate oversight of the four models of care that best suit the needs of terminally-ill patients and their families throughout our state.

Hospice is comfort care brought to every patient, whether in a private home, a nursing home, assisted living community or hospice house. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has defined four kinds, or "levels," of hospice care. One patient may experience all four levels, perhaps in just a week or ten days of hospice services. Another patient may experience one level of care throughout the duration of his or her hospice care. Each level of care meets specific needs, and every hospice patient is unique.

Every Medicare-certified hospice provider in Connecticut must provide these four levels of care:

1. Hospice Care at Home

At VITAS we offer several key services that support patients and their families so we can provide hospice care in the place that's most comfortable: home.

2. Continuous Hospice Care

Continuous hospice care is to be provided only during periods of crisis to maintain the beneficiary at home.

3. Inpatient Hospice Care

If a patient's needs cannot be managed at home, VITAS inpatient care provides hospice around the clock until the patient can return home.

4. Respite Care

With respite care, home hospice patients spend a short time in an inpatient hospice facility so their primary caregivers can take a break.

These regulations must be established quickly to ensure that hospice agencies can better align care delivery with the unique needs of dying patients as we recover from the pandemic. The outdated home health regulations have management staffing requirements that shift expenses away from hiring nurses and interdisciplinary team members required to provide direct bedside care. Further, where hospice employs an interdisciplinary team concept that executes a unique plan of care for each hospice patient, the current Connecticut regulations have the effect of undermining the collaborative elements that are so beneficial to the execution of a hospice plan of care.

VITAS Healthcare, the nation's leading provider of hospice services, has been providing hospice services in Connecticut since 2004. VITAS has been a pioneer and leader in the hospice movement since 1978. VITAS operates hospice programs in 15 states and the District of Columbia; employing nearly 11,649 professionals who care for terminally ill patients daily, primarily in the patients' homes, but also in our VITAS Inpatient Hospice Unit at Saint Mary's Hospital, in hospitals, nursing homes and assisted living communities/residential care facilities for the elderly.

In summary, VITAS urges you to support this regulatory change as it will enhance all hospices' ability to provide the full delivery of quality hospice care services throughout the State of Connecticut. Hospice provides the quality care patients and families deserve, in the location they desire.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments. You can contact VITAS Healthcare Director of Public Affairs Chris Santarsiero with any questions or comments at (203) 232-8422 or chris.santarsiero@vitas.com.