



Appropriations Committee Public Hearing

Human Services Subcommittee

March 3, 2021

Submitted by Cale Bradford, Chief Government Relations Officer

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Kushner, Representative Abercrombie and distinguished members of the Appropriations Human Services Sub-Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Cale Bradford and I'm the Chief Government Relations Officer for Elara Caring.

Elara Caring is one of the Nation's largest providers of home and community based health services, providing home health, personal care, behavioral health, and hospice assistance for 60,000 beneficiaries daily in 16 states. In Connecticut, we provide behavioral home health services state-wide and have historically been known as New England Home Care.

I'm here today to speak to the need of increasing rates paid to skilled home health providers in Connecticut. Significantly, the current reimbursement rates have been static since 2007 with the exception of a one percent increase in 2015. Accordingly, we're respectfully asking for a 4% increase to be made to these rates.

The availability of skilled home health services, in Connecticut and nationally, has made a significant contribution to permitting patients to avoid admission to and, where unavoidable, return home from the hospital quicker, while avoiding skilled nursing facility admissions for post-acute rehabilitation. Accordingly, skilled home health services have been very assistive in lessening the burden on health facilities during the pandemic and improving the safety of patient care and particularly for patients with significant health risks like those with co-occurrent mental health and chronic disease diagnosis.

Please know though, the additional costs associated with providing health services during a pandemic and which include those associated with protective health equipment, testing, enhanced care coordination and wages, all of which are continuing, when added to the broader inflation providers have experienced since the current skilled home health rate was established in Connecticut 14-years ago, is creating an untenable situation.

Connecticut has made significant investments in its personal care programs over the last several years. These programs are foundational to permitting Connecticut citizens who are aged or challenged by disability to live in their own homes. However, skilled home health services, which

have not received these same rate considerations, are critical to maximizing the value of the State's personal care program investments; as it's the skilled home health provider that's called to intervene, intermittently, with the higher acuity care, that avoids the acute events that send personal care patients into hospitals and skilled nursing facilities. These patient's success is dependent on the viability of the continuum of care; and Connecticut's decision not to address rates for skilled home health services for 14-years is consequentially challenging that viability.

In closing, I respectfully request the members of this committee consider the importance of skilled home health as part of Connecticut Medicaid's continuum of care; and recommend a 4% rate increase for skilled home health providers be included in this year's budget.