

**March 3, 2021**

***Written testimony of Helen Byron, Center Executive Director at Saint John Paul II Center Concerning the Governor's Recommended FY 2022 and FY 2023 Proposed Budget***

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is **Helen Byron**. I am the Center Executive Director at **Saint John Paul II Center** in Danbury, Connecticut. Saint John Paul II Center (SJP) has been providing nursing home care in our community for over 35 years. We are a 141 bed nursing home, and we have 135 employees working at our facility.

Our nursing home, the residents we serve, and our employees, have been challenged like no other during this pandemic and ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. We were especially impacted. Our nursing home had two outbreaks. One was in March – May 2020 and the second was in January 2021. There were direct consequences for our residents and our staff: A total of 142 residents contracted the virus and 75 staff total contracted the virus during the two outbreaks. While 104 nursing home residents recovered, we lost 38 residents. We did not lose staff. What is especially heartbreaking and tragic is that our staff did all they could to protect our residents. We implemented all the CDC and DPH protocols. We implemented rigorous resident and staff testing when testing became available in the early summer. We secured the PPE we needed and overcame the supply shortages that were present early in the pandemic. I am proud of what we were able to do as we were up against a virus that spread through persons showing no symptoms. In one of the early point prevalence testing dates we had 14 asymptomatic employees test positive. We live and work in a high positivity rate county. We faced staffing challenges especially when family members advised the employees to quit and not return to work to take the chance of being infected with the virus. We adapted to the severe and emotionally

draining visitor restrictions by facilitating communication through zoom calls, holding outdoor visits and only allowing compassionate care and virtual visits.

The sustained vigilance of our staff and the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out are now showing us the pathway to the end of this pandemic for our nursing home. Our resident vaccination percentage rate is 82%. Some were unable to receive the vaccine due to having received antibody therapy. 79 percent of our staff were vaccinated.

However, the nursing home occupancy decline experienced due to the ongoing pandemic has created unprecedented financial consequences to our already underfunded nursing home. Our pre-pandemic occupancy was 94 %. Today occupancy is 74%. We believe we will recover by 2022, but much more support is needed for us to get to the other side of this pandemic. The federal and state support we have received thus far has helped, but much more help is needed in the state budget Connecticut adopts this session. The level funding and severely underfunded acuity-based payment system in the Governor's proposed budget for nursing homes must not be approved. At this critical juncture, a substantial funding increase to our nursing homes is imperative so we can deliver the high-quality care we know everyone wants as we recover from this pandemic that has caused so much tragedy in our community.

On behalf of everyone at Saint John Paul II Center, **please substantially increase the funding for our severely threatened Connecticut nursing homes.**

Thank you.