



March 3, 2021

Written testimony of Fresh River Healthcare, Administrator, Fresh River Healthcare, Concerning the Governor's Recommended FY 2022 and FY 2023 Proposed Budget

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and to the members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jim Christofori. I am the Administrator at Fresh Healthcare in East Windsor, Connecticut. Fresh River Healthcare been providing nursing home care in our community for 44 years. We are a 140-bed nursing home, and we have 143 employee working at our facility.

Our skilled nursing facility, the residents we serve, and our employees, have experienced unprecedented challenges like in no other time during the epic and ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. Our facility, our residents and our staff were specifically impacted by outbreaks from April 2020 until June of 2020 with direct consequences for our residents and staff: 100 residents contracted the virus and 50 staff contracted the virus, we still grieve the many lives lost to this highly contagious and deadly virus. What is especially heartbreaking and tragic is that our staff did all that was in their power 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 very proud what we were able to do as we were up against a virus that spreading through persons showing no symptoms and in a state that was impacted with challenging rates of community spread of the virus. We faced staffing challenges like never before and we adapted to the severe and emotionally devastating visitor restrictions by facilitating communication and visitors through outdoor, indoor when allowed, compassionate care and virtual visits.

The sustained vigilance of our staff and the early availability of the COVID-19 vaccine for our residents and staff are now showing us the pathway to the end of this pandemic for our facility. Our resident vaccination percentage rate is 96% and 65% percent of staff have been vaccinated.

As we fought this year-long battle with the pandemic, our facilities occupancy declined significantly and has created unprecedented financial consequences to our already underfunded nursing home. Our pre-pandemic occupancy was 96 %. Today occupancy is 71%. We believe we will recover by 2022, but much more support is needed for our threatened to help us get us to the other side of this pandemic. The federal and state support we have received this far, but much more help will be 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 epic pandemic that has caused so much tragedy for our community.

I would also like to add that as an Administrator who worked in Massachusetts during the implementation of MMQs (similar concept to the CMI in Connecticut), the cuts imposed at the time had a negative impact on the facility's ability to provide quality care.

On behalf of everyone at Fresh River, please substantially increase the funding for our severely threatened Connecticut nursing homes.

Thank you.

Jim Christofori
Administrator