

March 3, 2021

*Written testimony of James Dahl, Administrator, Governors House Healthcare and Rehabilitation  
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 James Dahl, Administrator, at Governors House Healthcare and Rehabilitation in Simsbury, Connecticut. Governors House has been providing nursing home care in our community for over 30 years. We are a 70-bed nursing home, and we have 87 employees working at our facility.

Our nursing home, the residents we serve, and our employees, have been challenged as never before during this COVID-19 public health emergency. We were specifically impacted. Our nursing home had an outbreak beginning on December 1, 2020 with direct consequences for are residents and staff: 19 residents contracted the virus and 13 staff contracted the virus. While 11 nursing home residents recovered, we lost 6 residents directly to COVID and another 2 passed during the outbreak period. One of our staff contracted COVID as did her spouse. While she recovered, he spent weeks in intensive care and passed away from 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 significant 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.

Last week, after two months of indoor visitation restrictions, families were invited to visit their loved ones in person and indoors. The sustained vigilance of our staff and the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out are now giving us hope there may be an end to this pandemic for our nursing home. Our resident vaccination percentage rate is 100. 40 percent of staff have been vaccinated. Many staff were anxious about the vaccine because of historical and cultural histories in vaccination programs. We continue to encourage them to pursue opportunities for vaccination. While there is hope, the financial impact of the past year is significant.

Our decline in occupancy over the past year has created unprecedented financial consequences to our already underfunded nursing home. Our pre-pandemic occupancy was 80 %. Today occupancy is 54%. Our emphasis was on maintaining a safe environment for residents and staff. Despite extensive safety precautions, one of our primary hospital partners chose to refer to facilities that were COVID free. 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.

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

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Dahl', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

James Dahl, MPH, LNHA

Governors House Healthcare and Rehabilitation