

March 1, 2021

Written testimony of Jonah Kraus, Administrator, Fox Hill Center 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 Jonah Kraus. I am Administrator at Fox Hill Center in Vernon, Connecticut. Fox Hill Center has been providing nursing home care in our community for over 60 years. We are a 120 bed nursing home, and we have 140 employees working at our facility.

Our nursing home, the residents we serve, and our employees, have been challenged like in no other time during the epic and ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. We were specifically impacted. Our nursing home had outbreaks in April, May and June 2021 with direct consequences for our residents and staff: 82 residents contracted the virus and 34 staff contracted the virus. While 51 nursing home residents recovered, we lost 31 residents and staff to the 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 of 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 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 99%. 74% percent of staff have been vaccinated.

However, the nursing home occupancy decline experienced due to ongoing pandemic have created unprecedented financial consequences to our already underfunded nursing home. Our pre-pandemic occupancy was 91%. Today occupancy is 78%. We believe we will recover by 2022, but much more support is needed to help us get us to the other side of this pandemic. The federal and state support we have received thus 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 Fox Hill Center, please substantially increase the funding for our severely threatened Connecticut nursing homes.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonah Kraus', written in a cursive style.

Jonah Kraus, LNHA