

Testimony of Robert Page
Executive Director, Hannah Gray Home, Inc.

Re: H.B. No. 6439- AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Concerning

Department of Social Services Budget- Residential Care Home Funding
Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services Public Hearing, March 3, 2021

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on the Department of Social Services Budget related to Residential Care Home Funding.

My name is Robert Page and I am the Executive Director at Hannah Gray Home located in New Haven. I am here today to raise concerns with the Governor's budget related to residential care homes and express the strong and urgent need for a rate increase for residential care homes throughout the state.

Until President Biden and Vice President Harris stood at the Lincoln Memorial this past January and acknowledged mournfully our country's loss of individuals to the pandemic, our collective ability to grieve was under a mounting cloud of despair. The pandemic had taken 400,000 Americans from this life—mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, neighbors, friends, coworkers.... Left unspoken, left unaddressed by our leadership such profound and unrelenting loss added immeasurably to our fight against the Coronavirus. We continue the fight against the Coronavirus and tens of thousands of more Americans have fallen to it. But as the newly elected President and Vice President, along with others, invited us to pause and remember the precious souls lost, four hundred candles of light solemnly glistened on the waters of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool and brighten our collective darkness. The cloud of despair began to dissipate that night.

Hannah Gray Home, a refuge of dignity, respect and independence for its twenty co-ed residents, has been fighting against clouds of despair since the mid-1800s in the City of New Haven. Poverty, homelessness, economic and social injustices, access to health care, mental illness, aging, and a lack of family and other supports undermine life itself. They exact a terrible toll on our urban communities. As a member of the Connecticut Association of Residential Care Homes, Hannah Gray embraces the core value that all individuals deserve and have dignity. Concordant with that dignity is a right to food, clothing, shelter and healthcare. We look to you, speaking solemnly of the despair hovering over our Connecticut network of residential care homes and the individuals housed therein.

The debilitating effects and challenges that go hand-in-hand with the lack of rate increases is clearly seen in our inability to pay our employees a fair wage. Never has this been clearer than during the pandemic and the exposure long term care facilities have had to the Coronavirus. Although anxious and worried about contracting the virus and taking it home to their families, our workers continued to put in devoted hours of work in an already challenging environment for little more than the minimum wage!

Their devotion is admirable but a parent with home schooling responsibilities and need to put groceries on the table is caught in the proverbial “damned if you do and damned if you don’t.” Without these frontline workers our loved ones go uncared for. One staff member told me the day of our Wellness Celebration and second vaccination for staff and residents, “This is my fourth anniversary.” Another chimed in, “Yes, this is my sixth.” I was jubilant that they are still with Hannah Gray and embarrassed that I could not give them for their hard work what they deserved in pay.

We live a mission that values our residents. We prompt and support our employees to embrace and practice this value. But our employees, if we value them, deserve so much more for the work they do. They are exhausted like the nurses providing loving and compassionate care for our loved ones dying from Coronavirus, but then see some of us who do not heed the words of President, Biden, “We are all in this together.”

The inconsistent funding also challenges our business operations. During any given month, we have to make necessary repairs that keep our residents safe and are subject to state inspections. Unfortunately, we have virtually no margins to better attend to these essential costs. For example, coincidental with a recent anniversary, we were hit with a string of major equipment failures. Replacing industrial hot water tanks, dishwashers, sewage systems and the like greatly strains any budget, bringing the Home to its budgetary knees.

The Governor’s proposal to enable residential care homes to bill Medicaid acknowledges the need for higher rates. However, our industry has significant concerns with the proposal since it cuts money out of the state budget. That funding has been dedicated to residential care homes and becoming a Medicaid provider is a significant change to our model of care, and certainly not a guaranteed solution to our already fractured fiscal supports. Hannah Gray and the CARCH family of residential care homes throughout the state have had to get by with rates failing to keep up with operational costs—hardware and humanware. We are indeed proud to serve as the safety net for many people with mental health diagnoses and substance use issues. Our residents, however, are mostly state funded, critically limiting our ability to cost shift and make up for deficits resulting from inadequate rates.

Please pause and remember the CARCH population—our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, friends—and support residential care home funding and uncap our rates so that we can keep our great employees and pay them fairer wages while they care for some of the most vulnerable in the state.

Robert

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