



# Avon Health Center

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March 3, 2021

***Written testimony of Tina Richardson, Administrator, Avon Health 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 Tina Richardson. I am the Administrator at Avon Health Center, a Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation facility in Avon, Connecticut. Avon Health Center has been providing nursing home care in our community for over 45 years. We are a 120-bed nursing home, and we have 170 employees working at our facility.

Our nursing home, the residents we serve, their families, and our employees, have been extremely challenged during the ongoing Coronavirus COVID-19 public health emergency. We had all recommendations in place while we waited for our first case of COVID-19. We knew it wasn't a matter of "if", but rather a matter of "when" we would be hit. We were able to keep COVID-19 out of our building until the later part of the first wave. Our nursing home had two outbreaks, one in May of 2020 and the other in October of 2021 with direct consequences for our residents and staff. Many residents and staff contracted the virus. While the majority of our nursing home residents recovered, we still lost some to this insidious virus. If you can, imagine how heartbreaking it is to lose these residents, who become our friends and over time become like family to us. What is especially heartbreaking and tragic is that even after implementing all CDC and DPH protocols, and doing everything in our power to protect our residents, COVID-19 still found a way in. 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 cannot emphasize enough what a stressful time this has been for nursing home staff. You can't imagine what it is like during a COVID-19 outbreak for the staff, residents, and their families. I am very proud at what we were able to accomplish as we were up against a virus that spread primarily through persons showing no symptoms and in a state that was impacted with challenging rates of community spread of the virus, we were fighting an invisible enemy. We faced staffing challenges like never before and we adapted to the severe and emotionally devastating

visitor restrictions by facilitating communication and visits through compassionate care and virtual visits, outdoor visits, and indoor visits when allowed. The sustained vigilance of our staff and the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out has been a much-needed ray of hope for my staff, residents, their families, and the nursing home industry. At Avon Health Center, we are fortunate enough to be above the national average with our resident vaccination percentage rate at 94% and our staff vaccination percentage rate at 61%.

Our biggest challenge now is our decline in occupancy. This ongoing pandemic has created unprecedented financial consequences to the already underfunded nursing home industry. Our pre-pandemic occupancy was 92%, and today occupancy is 68%. We are working on rebuilding our census and are hopeful to recover to pre-pandemic percentages. This will be a long haul and take many months. At the rate we are going, it will take us until 2022 to recover. We are thankful for the federal and state supports that have helped us thus far. However, our industry, the one that cares for our state's largest population of frail and vulnerable residents, needs much more support. Please keep nursing home residents and their families in mind as you work through and approve the Connecticut state budget 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- and our residents deserve, as we recover from this unprecedented pandemic that has caused so much tragedy for our community.

On behalf of everyone at Avon Health Center, especially our residents, please substantially increase the funding for our severely threatened Connecticut nursing homes. We are counting on you to make a difference in the lives of our residents and their families.

Most Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tina Richardson".

Tina Richardson  
Administrator