



March 3, 2021

Written testimony of Theresa Sanderson, Administrator, West Hartford Health & Rehabilitation Center 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 Theresa Sanderson. I have been the Administrator at West Hartford Health & Rehabilitation Center in West Hartford, Connecticut for nearly 20 years. West Hartford Health & Rehabilitation Center has been providing nursing home care in our community for 45 years. We are a 160-bed nursing home, and we have 200 employee working at our facility.

This past year has been a particularly difficult year for our nursing home, the residents we serve, and our employees. Our facility had two major outbreaks during this COVID-19 public health emergency. Starting in March and continuing through May, 103 of our residents contracted the virus and 16 residents sadly died. 68 of our staff contracted the virus and 3 were unable to return to work. Again, in November we experience an outbreak that resulted in 29 residents contracting the virus and we tragically lost 11 residents. 10 of our staff contracted the virus during this second outbreak.

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 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 95% and over 50% 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 80 %. Today occupancy is 70%. 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 West Hartford Health & Rehabilitation Center, please substantially increase the funding for our severely threatened Connecticut nursing homes.

Thank you.