

**Testimony of Gilbert Santavenere
Owner, Highvue Manor**

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 Gilbert Santavenere. My brother, Joseph, and I are the owners of Highvue Manor located in Hamden. I have serious concerns with the Governor's budget related to residential care homes and would like to express the strong need for a rate increase for residential care homes throughout the state.

Highvue Manor is home to 47 men ranging in age from their 50s well into their 80s. We have some residents who are older and unable to properly care for themselves but most of our residents have psychological issues and a number have medical issues. Our staff works with them through their daily needs and issues.

It has been difficult over the past year as we close our doors to going out to the stores and to them receiving visitors. For the safety of all our residents and staff, we immediately followed the restrictions put on the nursing homes before we were given any guidance from the CDC or the State. They were forced to stop all of their normal activities as we had to try and minimize excessive contact between residents as much as possible. Being so restricted has been a challenging strain on their mental health. We have learned to be aware of "social distancing" and wearing masks out in public. They need constant reminders about the importance of it and wearing their mask correctly and wearing them every time they walk out of their room.

We had residents get the virus. Unfortunately, a number were not able to return as the virus was too much of a strain on them. The other negative to this was that, due to concerns with COVID, we were unable to bring in new residents. We did not want to spread the virus.

In an attempt to maintain and protect and encourage loyalty with our staff, we increased pay rates to help with their own issues at home and give them encouragement and support to their continued assistance of our residents. This has been a challenge for them as they also had to come to work and try to maintain a home life for families. While the State did provide a short increase towards employee's wages, the situation did not get better when the increase went away. We have had to continue to provide for our employees and encourage them to continue to care for our residents

As the pandemic has progressed, expenses have soared. When we could not get supplies, we were grateful that the State provided a much-needed supply of PPE. The

cost of cleaning supplies, sanitizers and PPE we have been able to obtain on our own has tripled and quadrupled. The inconsistent funding also raises challenges our daily operations. We are constantly having to make repairs that come up as normal wear and tear as well as any follow-ups in changes to State requirements.

Over the past year, we have had to pay employees that had to be out of work with COVID or had immediate, in residence family that were affected by COVID. We also had to pay our current staff to fill in the scheduling shortages because of these absences. This has caused further strain on our budget. We did not have any great reserves to pay for these extras. Our daily rates have been frozen for the better part of 12 years. There has been a significant strain on our ability to keep up with the task of caring for our residents. Adding to this, the expenses we currently face are pushing us beyond the limits to properly care for our residents and staff.

Unfortunately, paying employees the necessary wages to attract new people to our homes continue to be a challenge resulting in employee turnover. We strive to employ people in long term careers so that they can establish and maintain relationships with our residents. This leads to better long-term health outcomes, stability in the home and savings to our state.

Unlike other providers during the pandemic, we did not see any federal funding to support our work or our employees. 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. We need to ensure that our revenue is not decreased or it will jeopardize the sustainability of our home and ability to care for our residents.

We provide a critical service for the state and care for some of the most vulnerable people. We do this for a low cost \$81.01 per day to the state. My home and other residential care homes throughout the state have had to get by with rates failing to keep up with costs and yet we serve as the safety net for many people with mental health diagnoses and substance abuse issues. Unlike other providers, our residents are almost all state funded limiting our ability to cost shift and make up for low rates.

Please 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.

Thank you.
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