



March 3, 2021

Written testimony of Linda A. Urbanski, Ph.D. Administrator, Newtown Rehabilitation and Health Care Center Concerning the Governor's Recommended FY 2022 and FY 2023 Proposed Budget

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Linda Urbanski. I serve as the Administrator of Newtown Rehabilitation and Health Care Center, in Sandy Hook, Connecticut. We are a 154 bed nursing home, and have 160 employees working at our facility.

Our nursing home, the residents we serve, and our employees, have been challenged in numerous ways during the pandemic and ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. We were specifically impacted. Our nursing home had experienced outbreaks from April 24, 2020 through early July and then from November 11, 2020, through today with direct consequences for our residents and staff: While 122 nursing home residents recovered, 35 residents lost their lives to the highly contagious and deadly virus. What is especially heartbreaking and tragic is that our staff implemented all the CDC and DPH protocols in an effort to protect our residents. 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. We implemented every measure that we were able to, to control the spread of the Coronavirus. As everyone is aware, we were up against a virus that was spread by many unknowing, asymptomatic carriers. Staffing our facility posed additional challenges. But the most difficult challenge was trying to adapt to the severe and emotionally devastating visitor restrictions and the impact of those restrictions on our residents who lived to see their loved ones. Virtual visits, window visits, outdoor visits helped connect our residents with their loved ones as an interim measure. When indoor visits in designated common areas were initiated, many staff had tears in their eyes as they witnessed the joy on the faces of the residents and their loved ones.

The sustained vigilance of our staff and the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out are now showing us a pathway to the end of this pandemic. Our resident vaccination rate is 97.2 % and to date, 48.5 % of staff have been vaccinated.

However, the nursing home occupancy decline experienced due to the ongoing pandemic has created unprecedented financial consequences to our already underfunded nursing home. Our pre-pandemic occupancy was 84.5 %. Today occupancy is 68%. We believe we will recover by 2022, but much more support is required to help us move beyond the pandemic. We are most grateful for the federal and state support we have received thus far, but additional help is needed. We look to each of you for that help. 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 expects as we recover from this pandemic.

On behalf of everyone at Newtown Rehabilitation and Health Care Center, please consider a substantial increase to the rates of all nursing facilities in Connecticut.

Thank you.

Linda A. Urbanski, Ph.D.

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Administrator