

**Nursing Home and  
Assisted Living Oversight Working Group (NHALOWG)  
Staffing Levels Subcommittee**

Meeting Summary

Monday, December 7, 2020, 3:00 PM via Zoom

1. Opening Remarks

- Rep. Cook, Co-Chair, convened the meeting. She asked for a motion to approve the summary from the November 30<sup>th</sup> meeting, which was made, seconded, and unanimously approved.

2. Invited Presenters

- Barbara Blau, Director of Therapeutic Recreation at The Summit, Plantsville
  - Ms. Blau shared that she has been in this field for 30 years, and she described the changes she has seen over that time. Recreation staff previously offered multiple programs at a time, with individualized offerings. There were 2 staff members for every 50 residents. In response to the COVID outbreak, their roles shifted dramatically, and they are now primarily providing a "bridge" between residents and their families. They schedule and monitor in-person visits and facilitate virtual visits, which can sometimes be upsetting for residents. They also offer support groups for families, and communicate regularly with them. They are still able to provide some small group activities occasionally, and they provide ongoing support and comfort to residents. Ms. Blau also talked about Athena's new initiative, the Ambassador program, that had to be put on hold because of the pandemic.
  - Rep. Cook asked what the state could do, and Ms. Blau responded by talking about the challenges of not having volunteers, and of families not being able to assist with their loved ones' care. She said that more hours would be helpful, and suggested a 1:25 ratio going forward.
  - There was a discussion regarding training for the Ambassador program and for CNAs. Kate McEvoy, Co-Chair, raised the issue of the training pipeline, and Ms. Blau talked about the importance of finding people who "love people." Sandy Arburr of Athena Healthcare shared that the workforce is lean, and that it would be helpful if colleges focused not just on community recreation, but on therapeutic recreation. Lindsay Jesshop of ADS added that current Public Health code only requires 1 recreational staff person per 60 beds, and that most staff are now solely facilitating visits, instead of being able to provide critically-important recreation activities.

- The mechanics of family visitation were discussed, and Rep. Cook raised the issue of residents' lack of privacy in visits with their families. Ms. Blau explained that she normally brings her computer with her, so that she has other things to attend to and can honor confidentiality. Mag Morelli of Leading Age added that CMS guidance states that visits should have an adequate degree of privacy.
- Steve Bender, Executive Director, 1199NE Training and Upgrading Fund
  - Mr. Bender shared a presentation regarding the fund, which is supported by 48 CT nursing homes, and offers ongoing training to staff. Online COVID training was added this year. He talked about the challenge of retaining staff, and shared that, anecdotally, if workers stay past the first 6 months, they are likely to stay for a long time. The program "Engaging with Older Adults" has shown to be particularly effective in helping retain workers. Rep. Cook talked about the importance of developing apprenticeship programs. In response to discussion about helping PCAs become CNAs, Jean Aranha of CT Legal Services said it is important to strengthen both programs instead of weakening PCAs.

### 3. Continued discussion of the five main topics for consideration:

- Ensure that facilities adopt appropriate staffing policies to minimize spread of infectious disease (SR 17)
- Increase minimum required staffing ratios; support increases in workers' pay and benefits (LR 14)
- Ensure that staff have access to guaranteed sick time under state's existing paid sick leave regulations (LR 15)
- Workforce retention and recruitment
- Increase transparency and identify staffing necessary for improved communication

Rep. Hughes said that the policy recommendations should address the need to be flexible and responsive to crises. There needs to be adequate funding which covers more than the bare minimums. Rep. Cook talked about the importance of considering all the different types of staffing in making recommendations. Jean Aranha added it is important to look at the financing of nursing homes, including their corporate structure and licensing, including what oversight there is when there is a transfer of ownership. Matt Barrett emphasized the importance of elevating the status of the profession and creating a career ladder, including a payment system to finance it. He stressed that people should be paid well enough to have one job instead of 2 or 3, and incentive programs should be offered. Rep. Cook highlighted the inconsistency of hazard pay during the pandemic, and added there were issues pre-pandemic as well. She believes a CNA licensure could be an important component in lifting up the profession, as well as improving training and pay. Kate McEvoy wondered what levers the state and the private sector could bring to bear, and if acuity-based arrangements would be part of the solution. She

added that adequacy versus configuration of reimbursement should be explored, and that more money should ideally be spent on direct-care staff.

4. Continue to identify subject area experts to invite to present to the subcommittee
  - Jean Aranha requested to hear more information about licensing, especially during a change of ownership. Heather Berchem of CALA offered to speak on that topic. Zina Bennett, CNA, suggested the subcommittee hear a nurse's perspective. Mag Morelli and Matt Barrett accepted a request to present at the next meeting, and subcommittee members were asked to submit their questions to Heather Ferguson-Hull, Subcommittee administrator, by Wednesday. Rep. Cook then adjourned the meeting.
5. Next Meeting – Monday, December 14, 3:00 PM via Zoom