



103 Woodland Street
 Hartford, CT 06105-1240
 860-249-4862

Testimony
 Before the Public Hearing Health Committee
 Regarding

H.B. 7156
 An Act Concerning Hospice Services
 H.B. 7193
 An Act Concerning A Waiver From State Licensing Regulations for
 Hospice-only Providers

March 5, 2007

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Tara Green MSN, I am the Director of Hospice and H.O.P.E Program for VNA Healthcare. VNA Healthcare services approximately 12,000 patients through our Homecare and Hospice programs that service the Hartford and Waterbury Counties.

I am presenting testimony regarding H.B. 7156 and 7193. Our agency supports **HB 7156** with one technical amendment which is outlined in the written testimony. We **strongly support** this bill with one technical amendment: That the word "**or**" in section C and in the Statement Purpose be changed to the word "**and**", thus requiring that Hospices must be licensed by the Department of Public Health and Medicare certified. The implementation of this bill to require that hospices serve all settings is necessary and enforces Connecticut's model of providing consistent, high quality care to patients throughout the stages of terminal illness which we feel is the best way to care for our patients and families.

Our agency strongly opposes HB 7193 based on the following key issues:

- 1) **Continuity of Care across all settings:** This is a very important issue as hospices that are not licensed as a home health agencies will not be able to provide care to pre-hospice patients, patients who decide to accept hospice late in their lives or not at all, patients who are not covered by the Medicare Hospice Benefit or similar plan, and also those who revoke or who are discharged from the hospice program. The patient will not be able to have the same provider through the transition of care from traditional home care services (which currently is referred to as pre-hospice or palliative care)- this is a quality of care issue as well as a patient satisfaction issue.

- VNA HealthCare H.O.P.E program services patients who are pre-hospice we service an average of 200 patients daily. These patient are continuing to receive palliative care for their terminal diagnosis. Our program allows them to transition into our Hospice program seamlessly, they have the same nurse, social worker and home health aide that they had while on the H.O.P.E program. This allows them to tell their story once and allows for continuity of care across all settings. Given the turbulent time that our patients are Homecare trusted by Connecticut families & physicians for more than 100 years.

experiencing having a safe port, with one group of healthcare providers who remain constant is extremely beneficial to both the patient and the family.

- 2) **Decreased Regulatory Oversight:** WE HAVE SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS ABOUT DECREASING THE REGULATORY OVERSIGHT OF THESE PROVIDERS, WHICH COULD POTENTIALLY AFFECT THE QUALITY OF CARE PROVIDED TO HOSPICE PATIENTS. Because home care agencies are currently licensed, an agency follows a standard of care that has been established in our state. Decreasing the regulatory requirements for a specific group of agencies who are providing home hospice services will create an unlevel playing field. Patients who are serviced by a hospice who is licensed under this waiver, may not realize that the hospice he or she has chosen does not adhere to the same standards as those community-based hospice providers who choose to continue to meet state licensure regulations if they maintain their current business model which includes the care of pre-hospice patients. Specifically, elimination of state licensure regulations would result in the following:
- Decreased requirements for personnel qualifications, training and continuing education
 - Decreased supervisory requirements; no staffing ratios
 - Minimal/non-specific quality assurance requirements
 - Non-specific responsibilities for services rendered and timeframes for documentation.
- 3) **Unrestrained Growth will not address the issue of access for hospice patients and could financially undermine community based home care/hospice agencies.** There are currently 31 Medicare Certified Hospices in the state which are able to service all Connecticut towns. This is a significant number of hospices for a geographic area with no CON requirements. Significant increases in the number of hospices will adversely affect community-based providers in a number of ways:
- Recruitment/Retention issues due to limited number of qualified staff and volunteers who dedicate themselves to the care of hospice patients.
 - To provide needed care to patients, it is that there needs to be increasing awareness in the community about the benefits of hospice services.
 - Decreasing the number of patients serviced by a community-based hospice may result in decreased revenue and donations which are currently utilized by these hospices to assist in funding hospice and community programs. The income generated from community-based hospice provider is utilized for the benefit of the citizens of the community, not the shareholder. Ultimately, this benefits the entire region.
 - Through donations to VNA Healthcare has been able to provide free care to 1000 patients over the past year at a cost of \$531734.86 .
 - VNA Healthcare hospice services provide patients and families with limited finances with, nursing visits, social worker and spiritual counseling visits, home health aides services, food cards, linens, money to assist them with the funeral arrangements etc, which we would not be able to

do with out donations and revenue generated by our census.

- One half of all the free care/additional services that VNA Healthcare is able provide goes toward our patient and families with private/ no insurance- these are our younger clients who are not Medicare eligible, they have young families and are facing a terminal illness. The financial impact on these young patients and their families is overwhelming compounded by the emotional and the psychosocial drain to the family infrastructure. Many of these clients and their families would not receive the compassionate care and reduction in their financial burdens without the services of community based agencies like VNA Healthcare.

Increasing the number of hospices in the state will keep the patient census in each hospice artificially small- the issue is not that hospices are unable Thank you for your consideration of our comments. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.



Tara Green MSN
Director of Hospice and H.O.P.E
VNA HealthCare
103 Woodland Street
Hartford, CT. 06105
(860)493-7379