

**Testimony of Toni M. Fatone
Executive Vice- President**

SB 91 An ACT ALLOWING NURSING HOMES TO ESTABLISH TRAINING PROGRAMS for FEEDING ASSISTANTS

Sen Handly, Rep. Sayers and Members of the Public Health Committee, I am Toni Fatone the Executive VP of the CT Association of Healthcare Facilities and I am here today to wholeheartedly support SB 91 An Act Allowing Nursing Homes to Establish Training Programs for Feeding Assistants.

Nutrition and hydration are serious issues for our frail elderly- issues that threaten the lives and health of our residents. We are committed to addressing these problems intelligently and innovatively and we know that Feeding Assistants are a major part of the answer.

How do we know? There is empirical evidence from across the country that indicates that nutrition and hydration assistants are an innovative and effective way to relieve the problems of workforce shortages and overburdened caregivers. This program has worked successfully in several states prior to CMS adopting the rule permitting States to move forward with programs like the one in SB 91.

With appropriate training, proper utilization and supervision the use of nutrition and hydration assistants to help nursing staff complete feeding and hydration responsibilities has enormous potential to increase the availability of quality care residents receive. Specifically, this program can help address quality measures related to nutrition and hydration that are fundamental to resident health and quality of life.

At present, only family members or volunteers are allowed to help feed residents if nursing staff is unavailable. This simply makes no sense! A properly implemented program and the guidelines from the Federal Government are very specific as to what CT and all the other states must do to have an approved plan. The Feeding Assistant guidelines in no way diminish current requirements. Feeding assistants may not feed residents with "complicated feeding problems" such as difficulty swallowing, recurrent lung aspiration or those who are on tube or parenteral feeding. The minimum training requirements for these new Feeding or Nutrition and Hydration Assistants deliberately focus and will **EXCEED** the

training in these areas that CNA's receive as just one part of their overall instruction.

The Feeding Assistant program is an excellent example of a common sense change that can improve the quality of care our residents receive and I urge adoption of this legislation.