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**Testimony on SB 149
AAC Improved Social Worker to Resident Ratios in Nursing Homes
Select Committee on Aging
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On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut chapter, representing over 3300 members, we thank the Aging Committee for holding this subject matter public hearing. The dire situation of nursing home social work is one area of nursing home care that is rarely addressed. Yet it is the nursing home social worker who has primary responsibility for the resident's psychosocial health and is the advocate for families when concerns arise.

The Public Health Code is woefully inadequate when it comes to the beds-to-worker ratio for social work services. The current ratio of 120 beds to 1 full-time social worker dates back well over 20 years and bears no resemblance to a reasonable ratio for the current nursing home population. In essence, we are using a 20th century ratio to address 21st century needs of nursing home residents.

In just the past 10 years the presenting issues by seniors entering nursing homes has become much more acute in terms of complex diagnosis and mental health status. The degree of care needed demands greater attention by the nursing home social worker, yet the staffing ratio for nursing home social work has not been adjusted in accordance with these changing needs.

Nursing home social workers face multiple tasks and responsibilities including but nowhere near limited to: prompt referral for patients and families in financial need, helping each patient to adjust to the social and emotional needs related to nursing home placement, care plan meetings, staff meetings, developing plans of care for the social and emotional needs of the resident, counseling residents and family members, discharge planning, coordinating care with outside services, dealing with issues of conservatorship, protecting resident rights, assessing cognitive and mental functioning, dealing with resident to resident altercations, providing emotional support for residents coping with loss of independence and function, and staff training on resident rights. Then add an increasingly extensive amount of paperwork that includes: assessments; care plans; Mini Mental Status Exams; the new MDS 3.0 (Minimum Data Set) done upon admission, quarterly, annually and when a change in condition occur, Medicaid clinical evaluations, plus medical record charting of any changes with the resident. All of this and more is required of the social worker at a ratio of 1 full-time social worker to 120 residents. **The current ratio is absurd, outdated, undoable, and downright insane, and is a major**

factor in why qualified social workers burn out and leave the field of nursing home social work.

We estimate that under the current ratio and given the current responsibilities of nursing home social workers that the worker has about 11 minutes per week to address individual residents concerns and needs. In the spring of 2010 NASW/CT conducted a survey of nursing home social workers that had a 50% return rate. When asked what their biggest challenges were 72% answered it was lack of time to effectively perform their job.

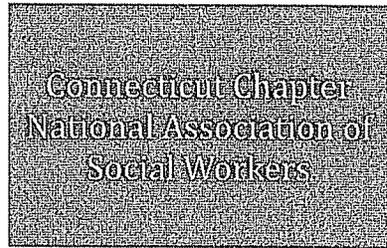
As Connecticut moves forward with Money Follows the Person and other steps to balance the long term system in Connecticut, it is the social worker who will play the key roles of identifying appropriate residents for discharge to the community, working with the resident and family to overcome obstacles, and frequently it is the social worker who arranges for a safe discharge with the necessary services in place. We applaud CT for putting an emphasis on rebalancing, however for rebalancing to be successful it is critically important that the nursing home social worker have the time to fully address the various issues and tasks that arise in returning a resident to their community.

SB 149 calls for the Department of Public Health to amend the Public Health Code by reducing the ratio of beds to worker. This bill provides a process for all concerned parties to offer input prior to a new ratio being adopted. For our part NASW/CT recommends a ratio of 80 residents to 1 full-time social worker. Such a ratio is still on the high side but recognizes the fiscal issues facing homes as well as the need for nursing home social workers to have a more reasonable caseload.

We urge the Committee on Aging to draft language for SB 149 and to vote in favor of its passage.



Social Workers
Help starts here.



Pass S.B. No. 149

An act concerning improved social worker to resident ratios in nursing homes

- Currently in Connecticut, social workers who are employed in nursing home settings contend with workloads in which the bed-to-social worker ratio is 120 beds to 1 full-time social worker. This ratio has been in the Public Health Code for over 20 years, is outdated and fails to appropriately address the ever increasing psychosocial and physiological needs of the modern day Long-Term Care client populations.
- The day to day challenges faced by nursing home social workers are enormous and complex. The social worker is responsible for all psycho-social services, patients rights, discharge planning, handling problems raised by residents and families, assistance with Medicaid and Medicare, initial and ongoing assessments, care planning meetings, adjustment issues, enormous amounts of charting and documentation, facilitating resident councils, crisis intervention, adjustment issues and much more that consumes the daily role of the social worker.
- As of October 1, 2010 the workload has dramatically increased due the new MDS 3.0 (Multiple Data Set) that is required reporting on a regular basis for all residents. The new MDS is far more extensive than the prior system and the social worker has considerable responsibilities for MDS reporting.
- Workload demands make it increasingly impossible for the social workers to be effective and have positive client outcomes. Under the current ratio the social worker has approximately 11 minutes of time per week to devote to individual residents.
- As the state moves forward in its rebalancing efforts, including Money Follows the Person, it is the social worker who will be responsible for identifying and working with residents and families to help transition these patients back into their community settings. Such efforts on the part of the nursing home social worker would afford significant savings to the state. Adversely, the current ratio of 120 beds to 1 social worker greatly hampers the workers' ability to find ample time to effectively take on this critical role.
- SB 149 addresses the workload issue by requiring DPH to amend the Public Health Code so that the beds-to-worker ratio is reasonable and reflective of the nursing home population in the 21st Century

