

Testimony of Deborah Chernoff

Communications Director, New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199, SEIU

Aging Committee, February 28, 2012

In Support of SB 139, SB 140, SB 142, SB 143 and HB 5215

I am writing in support of several bills before the Aging Committee today. Although none of these bills directly affect the 7,000 members of our union who provide care in Connecticut nursing homes, all represent good public policy in long term care. Our members take their role as advocates for the residents in their care seriously, and I am speaking on their behalf to support these legislative initiatives:

SB 139, "AN ACT CONCERNING NOTIFICATION OF FINANCIAL STABILITY OF NURSING HOME FACILITIES AND MANAGED RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES TO PATIENTS AND RESIDENTS," requires disclosure of receivership or bankruptcy status of a nursing home when a potential resident is considering moving to that facility. We strongly favor greater financial transparency in the nursing home industry generally, given the critical role of public monies in supporting long term care, especially in the for-profit sector. We support the right of individuals to have access to all pertinent information, especially when making an important decision that may entail spending down assets and/or selling a home. It is only right that potential residents have access to information about financial viability, especially because we have seen the traumatic effects on residents and families of unexpected closures and the consequent dislocations.

SB 140, "AN ACT CONCERNING GRIEVANCE COMMITTEES IN NURSING HOME FACILITIES," would establish grievance committees for nursing home residents to address issues that cannot be informally resolved. Such a process will give residents a meaningful and structured way to articulate, discuss and resolve problems parallel to the processes we have been able to establish for nursing home workers through collective bargaining. Just as having an effective voice in our workplace is important to the members of our union, having an effective voice in their own home is important to nursing home residents: a sense of personal control and input over decisions that impact their quality of life. Autonomy and dignity are just words without the policies and procedures in place to make them real and a grievance committee is a step in the right direction.

SB 142, "AN ACT INCREASING ELIGIBILITY FOR THE CONNECTICUT HOME-CARE PROGRAM FOR THE ELDERLY," would increase eligibility for participation in the Connecticut Home Care Program for the Elderly, while **SB 143, 'AN ACT INCREASING ELIGIBILITY AND FUNDING FOR THE ALZHEIMER RESPITE CARE PROGRAM,"** would do the same for the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program, as well as increase that program's funding. Both of these legislative initiatives are important components of our ailing long term care program. There are many people now or soon to be in need of support at home, both as receivers and as givers of care in the community. Current eligibility requirements are unrealistically low, given the broad and growing need, and we support expanding access to both program.

HB 5215, "AN ACT INCREASING THE PERSONAL NEEDS ALLOWANCE," would increase the Personal Needs Allowance for residents in nursing homes. We support this effort because,



Testimony of Deborah Chernoff

Communications Director, New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199, SEIU

while it is a small amount of money for each individual, having access to some money of your own, to spend on the things you need, by your choice and at your own discretion, is important. Again, this bill speaks to the personal and psychological need for autonomy, for acknowledgement of the worth and independence of nursing home residents and, as a practical matter, the current Personal Needs Allowance, which was cut last year, is simply far too low to accommodate those "little" items that most of us take for granted.

###

-PAGE 2 OF 2 -