



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Good morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and all distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. For the record, I am State Representative Lonnie Reed, of the 102nd District, Branford.

I am here to oppose HB-5499, An Act Concerning Regulations Relating to Hospice Care.

I want to begin by saying that I am a fervent believer that every family should have access to a high quality Hospice facility when the time comes to say goodbye to their loved ones. And I believe that we should encourage the creation of all kinds of Hospices to serve our Connecticut communities— small, six bed facilities; hospital rooms and units dedicated to hospice care; programs that deploy trained hospice caregivers to assist and support those people who wish to die in their own homes; and, where possible, Hospice Hospitals, with a full complement of programs and activities, such as our own Connecticut Hospice in Branford—the nation's very first Hospice.

Again more high quality hospice care in Connecticut is a goal I share. But the key words here are "high quality". I am very concerned that HB5499 will move us in the opposite direction by commanding the Department of Public Health to adopt regulations that, among other things, reduce to merely "adequate" the critical ratios of medical professionals to patients in keeping with the Medicare's minimal health and safety requirements.

I also fear that HB5499 will invite into our state a for-profit hospice industry that includes parent companies now under investigation by the U.S. Justice Department for unlawfully pocketing Medicare dollars without delivering high quality hospice services. And also for systematically recruiting non-hospice patients from nursing homes who are then warehoused long term in understaffed for-profit hospice facilities and deprived of the medications, activities and care they truly need.

I am not suggesting that proponents of HB5499 intend for bad things to happen. On the contrary - They are eager to make excellent Hospice Care more accessible to more people in facilities and settings that are an easy commute for the families of dying loved-ones. My concern is that HB5499 will have consequences that were totally not intended.

Forty years ago, our state made history by opening the very first Hospice in the United States. We developed best practices and helped pioneer a whole new way of experiencing the end of life. Terrified patients and grieving, frightened families are now transformed and able to find peace, love, comfort and even moments of joy as they say their final Good-Byes.

That is the kind of high quality hospice care we need to protect and to encourage in Connecticut.

Please reject HB5499. Thank you to the Committee for allowing me to testify.