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**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT WITH RESERVATIONS**

**OF RAISED BILL No. 5322
AN ACT CONCERNING NURSING HOME FACILITY
MINIMUM STAFFING LEVELS
MARCH 4, 2014**

My name is Kevin Brophy, and I am the Director of Elder Law for Connecticut Legal Services, a non-profit legal aid agency. My testimony is submitted on behalf of CT's low income elderly clients who reside in nursing homes.

Nursing homes may already be a fact of life for many Connecticut residents, and many more of us may one day face the difficult decision of seeking care for a loved one-- a spouse, sibling, parent, or child-- if family and community supports are unable to meet their medical needs. We may encounter the nursing home after a hospitalization, finding ourselves or our loved one discharged to a facility we know nothing about. Whenever we encounter a nursing home, we hope and expect that we or our loved ones will receive good quality care and will be safe.

One important indicator of quality care is the ratio of direct healthcare workers to patients. Connecticut's Public Health Code mandates only 1.9 hours of nursing staff care per resident per day, one of the lowest staffing standards in the country which has not changed in over 30 years. National studies have shown that nursing homes, however, need a staffing level of over 4.1 hours per resident per day for adequate care.

Not surprising then, many Connecticut nursing home residents are not being properly cared for. Call bells go unanswered and residents may suffer the indignity of not being promptly taken to the bathroom. Others are not being regularly turned and develop bed sores. Some become dehydrated. This poor care may even lead to death.

The state legislature has an opportunity to improve the quality of care for sick and frail nursing home residents by increasing the current nursing staffing ratios by passing Raised Bill No. 5322. It would require that nursing homes increase their nurse staffing from a minimum of 1.9 to 2.7 nursing staff hours per resident in a twenty four hour time period. Research at the federal and state levels has shown that the most effective way to improve staffing is to set appropriate ratios in state law. While we believe this ratio is still inadequate, it would be a step in the right direction by requiring nursing homes that currently have staffing levels below that



minimum to increase their nursing staff hours, which would lead to improved quality care.

Most Connecticut nursing homes already exceed the minimum staffing levels of 1.9 hours per day required by the Public Health Code. According to the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare (CMS), the state average is currently 3.5 hours per day. Moreover, by increasing staffing levels there will be cost savings. Better staffing and better care lessens staff turnover, lowers workers compensation premiums, and reduces the incidence of resident hospital visits.

Please support H.B. 5322.

Kevin Brophy
Director of Elder Law