

TESTIMONY

Delivered by Tracy Wodatch, VP of Clinical and Regulatory Services
The Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home

Human Services Committee
Public Hearing February 5, 2015

SUPPORT: HB 5814 AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF MEDICAID HOME HEALTH RATES

SUPPORT: HB 5827 AN ACT CONCERNING MEDICAID FUNDED HOME HEALTH CARE

Good afternoon Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and honorable members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Tracy Wodatch, VP of Clinical and Regulatory Services at the CT Association for Healthcare at Home. I am also an RN with over 30 years experience in home health, hospice, long term and acute care.

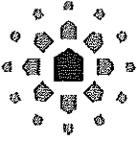
The Association represents 62 Connecticut DPH licensed/Medicare certified home health and hospice agencies that foster cost-effective, person-centered healthcare in the setting people prefer most – their own home.

Collectively, our agency providers deliver care to more Connecticut residents each day than those housed in CT hospitals and nursing homes combined. As a major employer with a growing workforce, our on-the-ground army of 17,000 home health care workers is providing high-tech and tele-health interventions for children, adults and seniors.

Our Association and its members SUPPORT Proposed HB 5827: AAC Medicaid Funded Home Health Care.

Specifically, I'd like to address the portion of this bill that speaks to the increased need for pediatric home health services delivered by home health providers in the community.

To offer some background, home health providers of pediatric services operate differently from traditional home health care in that nursing care is provided for extended time frames, often in shifts, anywhere from 4 to 23.5 hours per day. Many of these children have tracheostomies or breathing tubes and require artificial respirators or ventilators as they cannot breathe on their own. They are also on continuous oxygen, are tube fed as they are unable to enjoy food like most children, and are severely debilitated requiring 24/7 care.



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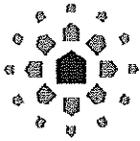
The number of CT home health agencies able and willing to care for such high tech, needy cases is limited. Two years ago, a large provider of this care closed its doors in CT citing low Medicaid reimbursement and restrictive DPH regulations. This closure left over 100 of these fragile children in need of care at home. To compound this loss, this type of continuous skilled nursing does not fit the traditional home health model as outlined in the regulations set forth by the Department of Public Health. For existing agencies to take on these additional cases, the regulations had to change quickly, but only by passing emergency regulations which was accomplished in early 2014. Now these agencies must apply for a waiver with special oversight by DPH to ensure quality care and supervision.

Even with these hurdles, the few that provide this specialty service forge ahead with their mission to continue to serve these children despite low Medicaid reimbursement and the challenges of the regulations; But, the bigger problem now is that the need for services is greater than the capacity of providers.

No one would argue that the best place for these severely compromised kids is in their own homes with their parents. Yet, with a limited number of providers and a Medicaid rate that doesn't cover costs of care, the alternate choice would be in a long term hospital such as the Hospital for Special Care—a far more costly option.

A simple and cost-effective solution would be to address the increase need for pediatric services at home as outlined in this bill.

Thank you.



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