Testimony of Gustave Keach-Longo
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Conservation and Development Subcommittee of Appropriations Committee
Potential of Decreasing Funding for
Assisted Living Demonstrations’ Rental Assistance Subsidies (RAP)
February 10, 2015

Members of the Conservation and Development Subcommittee:

My name is Gus Keach-Longo and I am Vice President of Senior Services for the Community Renewal Team. I joined CRT eleven years ago to open and operate The Retreat Assisted Living, one of the State Assisted Living Demonstration Pilots. These were designed to make assisted living affordable for low-income seniors and save State Medicaid funds that would otherwise be spent on nursing homes. I am pleased to present testimony concerning any potential changes to the funding for the housing component of the model.

With the recent move of the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) subsidies administration to the Department of Housing (DOH) and the newly consolidated State agencies’ budgets as proposed by the Governor, there is significant concern that the financial support for the Assisted Living Demonstration Pilot may be affected by competing funding priorities within the DOH.

The RAP subsidies are a critical component of the Demonstration Pilot model, as they support the housing expenses for our seniors. The RAP enables the seniors to afford their apartments with incomes as low as $1,000 gross per month. By combining RAP subsidy with Medicaid Waiver funds through the Department of Social Services’ Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders (CHCPE), our state is able to provide a low-cost assisted living alternative for seniors living in poverty.

The Retreat was developed as one of four assisted living communities with the goal of saving State Medicaid funds previously spent on nursing homes. This was over a decade ago, prior to the current Rebalancing efforts undertaken by the State to reduce the projected Medicaid costs increases. As of December 31, 2015, CRT’s The Retreat project alone has saved CT tax payers approximately $3.2M per year (or $35.5M to date).

The population we serve at The Retreat is different than traditional (and other Demonstration) assisted livings. Our seniors look like this:

- They are 82 years old, on average, and receive over 17 of hours of care per week.
- As many as 83% of our seniors are without family support. They are the last of their family, may be estranged from their families, or their relatives cannot function as a family unit.
- 74% have some type of mental health concern and 61% receive mental health-related counseling and/or medication management.
- This population is in need of on-site psycho-social support (e.g. day-to-day redirecting) to be successful.
- Over 10% came through Protective Services for Elderly and/or providers like the Institute of Living.
• Over 12 have experienced periods of homelessness because they were not stable living independently with just scheduled care services through CHCPE.
• 38% men (compared to 26% in traditional assisted livings) *
• 25% African American (compared to 4% in traditional AL) *
• 11% Latino (compared to 1% in traditional assisted living) *

Prior to the Assisted Living Demonstration, the specific low income population served by The Retreat often found themselves in crisis. As they aged the coping skills they acquired during their lives to manage their responsibilities waned. This is often due to life-long mental health concerns (often undiagnosed). Many of these seniors were able to live week to week on their own when younger, but then struggled as their skills decreased. Sometimes they also were connected to family who helped them be successful, however, by the time they were seniors, relationships with supportive families often decreased (due to strains on the relationships over the years or older family members having passed on).

Often, our seniors are not taking medications properly, not following medical treatments and suffering from moderate self-neglect. Many of these seniors need onsite supports to help them cope with their challenges, which an assisted living environment supports well. Over time, The Retreat has evolved to fill the gaps in the elder care system for these individuals, who are healthy enough to not need 24-hour nursing associated with a nursing home setting. Yet, they do need an onsite flexible support structure when they are overwhelmed with their emotions.

The RAP subsidy enables these seniors to live in their own apartments at The Retreat and maintain their privacy and dignity while receiving the unique supports of The Retreat when needed. If these individuals were in the community with scheduled services through the CHCPE, they would be on their own through periods of time each day. They would return to struggling with their emotions when there are no scheduled caregivers around (i.e. evenings and weekends) and would become at risk again. These individuals do not need the environment of a skilled nursing facility, and they do not need 24 hour live in caregivers in the community. They need the supports associated with an assisted living setting, which allows them to remain in the least restrictive environment.

In closing, the housing component of the Assisted Living Demonstration Pilot model is vital to caring for these seniors of all different types of backgrounds and functioning levels within the community versus placing them in far more costly institutional settings. Also, if the funds are reduced for the Demos by the Department of Housing to support other housing programs, the senior services providers in our area will struggle to find options for their clients that are not nursing home based. That is why the Community Renewal Team, the CT Assisted Living Association and LeadingAge CT are requesting that as the details of DOH’s budget are reviewed, the Assisted Living Demonstration Pilots’ RAP subsidies remain fully preserved.

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* Source: 2010 CDC National Survey of Residential Care Facilities Survey (Resident Responses)
MAINTAINING DIGNITY, SAVING TAXPAYERS MONEY

CRT’s Retreat Assisted Living in Hartford is one of the state’s Demonstration Assisted Living Pilots, designed to help low-income seniors avoid premature and costly moves into nursing homes. The Retreat has saved the State of Connecticut millions of dollars.

439 Seniors have lived at The Retreat in 11 years since it opened

80 Seniors would be in nursing homes today if they could not live at The Retreat

170 Seniors moved into The Retreat from skilled nursing facilities

$6,657,600 Average annual Medicaid expenditure for those 80 seniors in a nursing home

$3,427,165 Total annual State of CT expenditure for The Retreat

$3,230,435 Estimated savings for State of CT for FY 2015

$35,534,785 Estimated savings to State of CT for 11 years of The Retreat’s operation
MAINTAINING DIGNITY,
SAVING TAXPAYERS MONEY

CRT’s Retreat Assisted Living is designed to keep moderately frail seniors in their own communities. It uses blended funding to make assisted living affordable for people who could not otherwise afford it. Who lives at The Retreat?

82
Years, average age of residents

17
hours of services per week, on average

83%
have no family contact

44
came through DSS Protective Services for the Elderly

74%
have a diagnosed mental impairment

61%
receive some form of mental health counseling or medication management

89%
cannot follow medical instructions without day-to-day prompts or direction