



February 11, 2016

Written testimony of Bernadette L. Stevenson, Administrator, Laurel Ridge Health Care Center Concerning the Governor's Recommended FY 2016 and FY 2017 Proposed Budget

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and to the members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Bernadette Stevenson. I am the Administrator at Laurel Ridge Health Care Center in Ridgefield, Connecticut. Laurel Ridge Health Care Center is a longstanding provider of nursing care in the community of Ridgefield. We are a 126 bed skilled nursing facility serving all populations including but not limited to short term, long term and Alzheimer's residents.

I want to begin by letting you know how proud I am to represent the wonderful and talented staff at Laurel Ridge. I'm the administrator, but our devoted caregivers, our RNs, LPNs, CNAs and Rehab staff all want what I want----that is to deliver the highest quality care experience to anyone who comes to Laurel Ridge. These workers are doing an amazing job, and I am so grateful to them, and proud of them, for everything they are doing. With their assistance and pledge to provide the residents with the highest quality care, we have reduced our re-hospitalizations to 4% from 40%. We have decreased incidences of falls, reduced use of anti-psychotic medications and have increased our resident's functional abilities through rehabilitation programs.

But making the care great has so many challenges. Making the care what everyone wants for their loved ones is getting harder and harder. And the reason it's getting so hard isn't really difficult to understand---there has been almost no help in the budget going on now for 10 years. While the budget proposal doesn't now have a specific nursing home reduction, if passed as is will lead to a decade of nearly flat funding for our nursing facility. The idea that our nursing facility could be cut this session because of our state's ongoing financial troubles is so devastating. It is really beyond my ability to understand how we could deliver the care we want to deliver if we were cut.

I do want to say how grateful we are that money was included in last year's budget for our nursing home workers. Acknowledging the critically important work being done every day with wage and benefit increases for our caregivers is so important to our mission to deliver high quality care.

But we under so many additional pressures beyond the important need to pay our workers a fair wage for the great jobs they are doing. Here are some examples:

- Acuity within nursing homes increased significantly. Residents coming to our home are more ill with multiple comorbidities and require more supplies and services. Supplies and services like wound care, bariatric care, cancer treatments, medications etc. In addition, they services require more staff time and assistance to maintain the highest quality of care. And although we are reimbursed through other programs like Medicare, the fee for service system leaves the cost of these supplies and treatments on the shoulders of the facilities to bear. These costs have significant impact on our bottom lines and impact our ability to provide care.
- Increase in utilities, (i.e. electricity, natural gas, water, etc.), food, encryption software and criminal background checks have increased significantly.
- We continue to struggle with our Medicaid recipients and their compliance with paying applied income. As family members become more dependent on their loved one's social security and pension, they are failing to pay their applied income; these payments are necessary to pay for the care in the facility.

Please help us deliver the high quality care we want to deliver.

On behalf of everyone at Laurel Ridge I thank you for your consideration of my testimony.


Administrator