Testimony of Heather Aaron, Executive Director, Leeway, Inc.
In support of
H.B. No. 5252 AN ACT CONCERNING NURSING HOME BEDS FOR AIDS PATIENTS

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Committee, my name is Heather Aaron and I am the Executive Director of Leeway, Inc., a non-profit organization located in New Haven.

Since opening in October 1995 to address the care needs of terminally ill AIDS patients, Leeway has grown from a thirty-bed nursing home to an organization offering: 1) 30-beds of licensed skilled nursing and 30-beds of residential care home services in a sixty bed facility located in New Haven; 2) forty-one independent residential units operated at five locations; and 3) community case management services beginning this spring.

I am here today to ask for your support of HB 5252 AN ACT CONCERNING NURSING HOME BEDS FOR AIDS PATIENTS.

Last year, Public Act 15-5, June Special Session, eliminated the long-standing exemption to the nursing home moratorium for additional beds associated with services to persons with AIDS. While requests for new beds were exempt from the moratorium prior to adoption of Special Session PA 15-5, any proposal to add beds remained subject to certificate of need review by the Department of Social Services and therefore new beds could only be added when determined necessary by the state.

With elimination of the AIDS exemption, if Leeway ever wants to propose adding nursing home beds to meet needs we will need to purchase bed rights from a nursing home that decreases its capacity. Based on our understanding of past bed right transactions we could expect to incur at least $100,000 for the rights to add ten beds through a transfer.

People with HIV/AIDS are living longer but, like many who are aging, they may eventually need nursing home care. Leeway's residents have an average of seven diagnoses and we believe dedicated facilities with experience and expertise in AIDS care like Leeway are best positioned to provide quality and cost-effective care.

The typical nursing home resident has an average age of 80. The HIV nursing home resident has an average age of 55. The typical 80 year old is aging and would benefit from a less restrictive nursing home environment with family and home attendants. The typical HIV nursing home resident is living longer with the following chronic co-morbid diseases (1) End Stage Renal Disease with Dialysis (3) times per week (2) Cancer (3) Hepatitis C (4) Diabetes (5) Heart Disease (6)Mental Illness and (7) Substance abuse.

At age 65 this HIV resident is no longer able to live independently with home attendants, but require 24 /7 nursing home care. This resident requires intensive inpatient care and cannot live with family and a home attendant.

Over the last 10 years with residents living longer we have learned that the medications have prolonged life but do accelerate the aging process which affects the major organs. We hope that science will continue to develop medications that will reverse the effects of the disease permanently; however the need to leave the option available to add beds would be in the best interest of those living with HIV/AIDS.

We ask that you strongly consider reestablishing the AIDS exemption to the nursing home bed moratorium.