



The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care is submitting this testimony in support of SB 278, *An Act Concerning Nursing Home Facility Minimum Staffing Levels*. The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care is a non-profit organization that advocates on behalf of nursing home residents and other long-term care consumers. SB 278 would increase staffing levels for both nursing staff and social workers.

Social work

The psychosocial needs of residents in nursing homes are complex and do not vary by facility size. Yet facilities with more than 120 beds must have a qualified social worker, while smaller facilities do not. This makes little sense since the needs of a resident in a nursing home with 120 and fewer beds are no less critical than those in larger facilities.

An appropriate number of social workers is a key factor contributing to quality of care and quality of life for nursing home residents. In facilities that actually have one full-time social worker, that individual cannot meet the needs of all residents. According to an Office of Inspector General report in 2003, some 39% of residents with psychosocial needs had care plans that were inadequate to meet those needs; 41% of those with psychosocial needs addressed in their care plans did not receive all of their planned psychosocial services, and 5% received none of these services; and a total of 45 % of social workers reported barriers to providing psychosocial services, including not having enough time, and insufficient staff.¹

In a 2010 study of a nationally representative sample of more than 1,000 nursing home social services directors, almost three-fourths commented that an appropriate ratio would be one full-time worker for 60 long-stay residents, and more than half suggested a ratio of one full-time worker per fewer than 20 subacute residents.²

Increasing the staffing levels to one social worker: 80 residents in 2016 and then to 60 in 2020 as called for in SB 278 would better ensure that the psychosocial needs of residents are met as required by law and regulation.

Nursing staff

Low staffing levels are the single most important contributor to poor quality of nursing home care in the United States. In addition to extensive research linking staffing to

¹ Psychosocial Services in Skilled Nursing Facilities. Office of Inspector General. Department of Health and Human Services. March 2003.)

² Nursing home social services directors' opinions about the number of residents they can serve. Bern-Klug M1, Kramer KW, Sharr P, Cruz I. J Aging Soc Policy. 2010 Jan;22(1):33-52. doi: 10.1080/08959420903396426

improved quality of care, higher staffing standards have been shown to be cost-effective as well.

Despite these well-established findings, there is no mandated minimum number of nurse and nursing assistant hours per resident/day required by the Federal government. In 2001, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released its report, *Appropriateness of Minimum Nursing Staffing Ratios in Nursing Homes*, which provided specific minimum staffing thresholds below which quality of care would be compromised. This report puts forth the recommendation for a daily minimum standard of 4.1 hours of total nursing time and found that staffing levels falling below this minimum put nursing home residents at risk. The Institute of Medicine supported these findings.

Current Federal law requires that nursing homes participating in Medicare and Medicaid have “sufficient staff to provide nursing services to attain or maintain the highest levels of physical, mental and psychosocial well-being of residents.” The lack of specificity at the Federal level means it is left to the states to establish staffing requirements, and there is wide variation in state law as it relates to minimum staffing in nursing homes.

Connecticut currently mandates a staffing level of only 1.9 hours per resident/day – among the worst in the country. For a state that excels in many other areas, such a minimal requirement is shocking. While this legislation, which would increase that requirement to 2.3 hours per resident/day, is still far from the 4.1 hours per resident day the government study recommends, it is a very important first step in the right direction.

Stronger laws are long overdue in Connecticut, especially since nursing home residents in this state and across the nation have higher acuity levels than ever before. The massive study done by HHS, and the scores of studies done in the years since, have proven the link between staffing and quality outcomes.

Even top-notch nurses and nurse aides cannot deliver quality care if there are not enough of them. The time has come to strengthen Connecticut’s nursing home staffing laws. The state’s most vulnerable residents deserve no less.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robyn Grant". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Robyn Grant
Director of Public Policy and Advocacy