



Avon Health Center

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Written testimony of Russell Schwartz, VP/Director of Operations for Avon Health Center and West Hartford Health & Rehabilitation 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 Russell Schwartz. I am Director of Operations for Avon Health Center and West Hartford Health & Rehabilitation Center. Our facilities are longstanding providers of nursing care in the communities of Avon and West Hartford. Combined we have 280 beds, and over 400 employees. Both facilities have received the American Health Care Association's Silver Quality Award, and have 5 star ratings from Medicare.

As a second generation operator, I want to continue the tradition of excellent care and service delivery started by my parents. But making the care great has so many challenges. Resident, family, and regulator expectations continue to grow, as the funding for these services in Connecticut has been virtually flat for the past 10 years. I strive to meet and exceed my customers' expectations, but it's getting harder and harder. Although the current budget proposal does not call for any specific nursing home reductions, if passed as is, it will be a decade of nearly flat funding for our nursing facility. Any cuts to our facilities at this point would be disastrous. I don't know how we could deliver the care that we are known for with any cuts.

I certainly appreciate the funding that was included in last year's budget for providing wage increases to our dedicated staff. Recognizing our staff's critically important work being

done every day with wage and benefit increases is so important to our mission to deliver high quality care.

However we continue to face additional costs pressures beyond paying our staff fair wages for the jobs do. Property taxes, utilities, insurance, food and supply costs continue to rise every year. It is becoming very difficult to meet these obligations when funding has remained flat year after year. Patient acuity has increased, contributing to increased staff demands. But the funding does not support these demands. Our physical plants, equipment and infrastructure need regular updating and replacement, yet the capital is not there to meet these needs. Cost containment efforts and reduced lengths of stay still do not cover the rise in operating costs. Connecticut nursing homes must be appropriately funded in order to meet the public's expectations of quality.

Please help us to continue to deliver the high quality care and services we have pledged to give our residents, and your constituents.