Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Denice Panella. I am a Registered Nurse and have worked in the same nursing home facility for 18 years. I started my career there as a CNA, graduated to an LPN, was honored with becoming a CT Florence Nightingale, and then graduated to an RN. I know first hand the struggles we face as direct hands on caregivers, not only the on the job struggles, but in our personal lives as well. I understand that Health Care is a business, but I will never understand how budgets and limitations are placed on caring for human beings?

Our patients deserve better quality care, which means increased staffing. We work one Nurse to 32 patients and on 3rd shift it is one Nurse to 64 patients. Our CNAs are caring for 12, 15, 20, 32 patients. Every single department is effected. I could not imagine working my whole life and having to lose everything I owned to live in a facility where strangers have to care for you. I would never want to hear, “You have to stay in bed today because no one is here to care for you.” Working at State minimum requirements increases the risk of on the job injuries. Nursing homes are no longer caring just for the elderly; we are accepting heavier, more challenging patients that we are not equipped to care for: Psychiatric patients with behavioral issues, obese patients, and substance abuse detoxing patients. Home care is not the answer either. Most people cannot care for their loved ones at home when in order to survive all household members have to work. It is a misconception that caregivers get yearly raises and many are not even making $15/hour. This needs to change.

We are tired of the excuses, “It’s not in the budget”. The budget needs input from frontline workers most. Corporate bosses who don’t have a clue as to what the job entails should have no say. I’m sure they were warm and snug at home with their families during this last snow storm, while we were the ones risking our lives driving in the storm on dangerous roads to care for others.

Our current staff is burnt out and no one is choosing nursing home careers anymore, mainly because of the staffing and funding issues. Assignments are too heavy, patients are sicker, and our risk of injury is at an all-time high. We need more staff and deserve raises in order to continue to live in CT. Our residents and caregivers deserve better.