

Testimony of DR. KULDIP S BHOGAL
Administrator HIGH CHASE RCH

Re: H.B. No. 6446 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN SERVICES.

Human Services Committee Public Hearing, March 4, 2021

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Senator Berthel, Representative Case and Members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony against the rate cap on residential care home in Section 8 of House Bill 6446- An Act Concerning the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Human Services.

My name is Dr. Kuldip S Bhogal and I am the Administrator at High Chase RCH in Willington.

I am here today to raise concerns with the Governor's budget related to residential care homes and express the strong need for a rate increase for residential care homes throughout the state.

Our home is licensed for 36 beds. Our residents are mostly mentally and physically challenged, many are homeless and almost all have no one to fend for them:

1. We treat all our residents as a family.
2. We take care of the safety of our residents and provide them with a warm, clean, and comfortable environment, 24 hours a day every day.
3. There are, at least two members of Staff, at all times.
4. It is a full board and lodge facility.
5. We supervise and administer the resident's medication up to 4 times a day by trained Staff.
6. We liaise with doctors and Pharmacists and order medications and check all the ordered medication.
7. We arrange doctors' appointments.
8. We arrange blood orders.
9. We do the laundry.
10. We clean resident's rooms, bathrooms, corridors, and all common areas.
11. We take daily census.
12. During the Pandemic we have been taking daily temperatures, enforcing mitigation etc.

Our rates have now been frozen for the last decade although all our expenses have doubled or tripled in many cases including:

1. food,
2. utilities (propane for heating, generator, and cooking), Electricity, water bills,
3. housekeeping goods,
4. repairs and maintenance,
5. workers compensation,
6. liability insurance,

7. personal and property taxes
8. Medical and Dental charges etc.

To balance our books, we have:

1. Cut down on many expenses.
2. Reduced our Medical and Dental cover to all new staff members.
3. Reduced our 401K plan contributions to 3% instead of 10%
4. Stopped the services of our pest control person.
5. We now try and do our own maintenance like yard work, snow plowing and shopping,
6. Basically, living within our means

The biggest challenge with the lack of rate increases is the ability to pay our employees a fair wage. Never has this been more needed after our workers have put in countless hours of work in a challenging environment for little more than the minimum wage!

We value our employees who deserve so much more for the work they do for a challenging but rewarding population. They are trained in medication administration, food hygiene and food handling.

Recruiting Staff is a major problem with the wages we can afford to offer. We have a high turnover of Staff due to these low wages when other companies offer far more with reduced responsibilities. Each time we now hire a new person we pay \$105 for the FBI fingerprinting and background checks that were made mandatory by the DPH two years ago. Many of these new recruits often leave after a short time.

Pandemic has been a particular challenge:

1. An employee returning from China had to quarantine for 14 days. Another employee proved positive for Covid-19 and was off work for three weeks. We paid them both for all their days off plus covered their shifts, resulting in substantial overtime payments.
2. Staff continued to work even when there was shortage of PPE's.
3. Take daily temps and monitor resident's symptoms.
4. Arrange hospital admissions as required.
5. Taking care of infected residents. We had three positive cases of Covid-19 at High Chase requiring isolation, daily room, and bathroom sanitizing, taking food to the infected residents etc. Staff continues working during these difficult and challenging times despite the fear that they might get infected themselves and take the virus home to their loved ones.
6. Making sure all residents complied with mitigation despite several residents refusing to comply.

High Chase needs funds to:

1. replace an old generator that is on its last leg. We cannot get new parts for this old model.
2. We need new furniture in all living rooms and bedrooms.
3. We need new flooring throughout the home
4. Front retaining wall need repairs urgently as it is falling on to the walkway.
5. Front deck is dangerous and needs repairs,
6. Driveway needs to be resurfaced as it is uneven and dangerous to falls.
7. And many other items that are not listed here.

Unfortunately, paying employees the necessary wages to attract new people to our industry continues to be a challenge resulting in employee turnover. Our industry strives to employ people in long term careers so that they can establish and maintain relationships with our residents. This leads to better long-term health outcomes, stability in the home and savings to our state.

The inconsistent funding also challenges our business operations. We are constantly having to make repairs that are subject to state inspections and yet have virtually no margins to do so.

Unlike other providers during the pandemic, we did not see any federal funding to support our work or our employees. The Governor's proposal to enable residential care homes to bill Medicaid acknowledges the need for higher rates. However, our industry has significant concerns with the proposal since it cuts money out of the state budget. That funding has been dedicated to residential care homes and becoming a Medicaid provider is a significant change to our model of care. We need to ensure that our revenue is not decreased, or it will jeopardize the sustainability of my home and ability to care for our residents].

We provide a critical service for the state and care for some of the most vulnerable people. We do this for a low cost at a diem rate of \$72 per day whereas the true rate should be \$95 to \$100. My home and other residential care homes throughout the state have had to get by with rates failing to keep up with costs and yet we serve as the safety net for many people with mental health diagnoses and substance abuse issues. Unlike other providers, our residents are almost all state funded limiting our ability to cost shift and make up for low rates.

Please support residential care home funding and raise our rates so that we can keep our great employees and pay them fairer wages while they care for some of the most vulnerable in the state.

Thank you.

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