

Testimony of Cheryl Dence
Administrator at Char-Laine Manor

**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 regarding residential care home funding. I am writing to testify 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 Cheryl Dence and I am the owner/administrator at Char-Laine Manor located in Vernon. 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.

We are a 23 bed facility with mentally challenged clients who need our support daily. Clients receive 3 meals per day, snacks throughout the day, medication administration, help with personal needs such as bathing, doctor appointments, laundry, housekeeping, arrange facetime with therapists/psychiatrist, family members, haircuts, in house recreation/outings, shopping. This past year and current are very challenging with guidance procedures for COVID-19. Costs have gone up for everything which is very challenging being on the same rate for many things such as real estate taxes, property taxes, workmans comp, electricity, food, gas, etc.

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. Staff has been put under more stresses such as having residents follow guidelines, reminding the clients to wear their mask properly, social distancing, putting in extra hours due to their co-workers not being able to come in due to family members or themselves in quarantine for Covid-19 issues which has put a strain on Char-Laine Manor needing to pay for the extra covered hours and pay the staff member who is out. Our facility does not have the support from case workers, transitional nurses for our clients has also put a strain on issues with these clients as they can not come into the building (they can not stay outside because of the weather), which is putting more on staff to give even more support because of that.

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. Repairs oh my, we had to update our sprinkler system, things such as door closers have been going and very expensive to have fixed, had troubles with the grease trap as well, had to install a new carpet on the first floor as the one that was there the seems were coming apart and was a trip hazard. Freezers had to be replaced.

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 provide a critical service for the state and care for some of the most vulnerable people. We do this for a low cost to the state. 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.

Cheryl Dence

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