



Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Public Employees

Submitted by LeadingAge Connecticut

Regarding

Senate Bill 1002, An Act Concerning Labor Issues Related to Covid-19, Personal Protective Equipment and other Staffing Matters

House Bill 6595, An Act Concerning Labor Issues Related to Covid-19, Personal Protective Equipment and other Staffing Matters

House Bill 6478, An Act Concerning Workers' Compensation

March 11, 2021

LeadingAge Connecticut is a membership association of over 130 not-for-profit and mission-driven organizations representing provider organizations serving older adults across the continuum of aging services. LeadingAge Connecticut members are governed by community boards, provide care, services and housing for approximately 12,000 older adults each day, and employ over 15,000 staff persons. Our members share a common mission of providing high-quality care and services, which many have been providing since the 1800s.

On behalf of LeadingAge Connecticut, I respectfully submit the following testimony in opposition to the manner in which the following bills before you today are proposed to be administrated and funded: *Senate Bill 1002, An Act Concerning Labor Issues Related to Covid-19, Personal Protective Equipment and other Staffing Matters*; *House Bill 6595, An Act Concerning Labor Issues Related to Covid-19, Personal Protective Equipment and other Staffing Matters*; and *House Bill 6478, An Act Concerning Workers' Compensation*.

The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Over the past year, the aging services field has been at the center of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 is a virus that has targeted the very people we serve. As such, our member organizations have been uniquely impacted by the pandemic, unlike any other health care provider sector. And we are proud of our efforts. LeadingAge Connecticut members have faced this pandemic head on and continue to do so as we protect and compassionately care for the most vulnerable older adults in our state.

Throughout this pandemic, our network of providers has relied upon, nurtured and protected our employees to the best of our ability. We have taken great strides to reward their efforts and to bring them comfort in their sorrow and distress. We have provided employees with bonuses in recognition of the challenges they have faced in serving our residents. Early in the

pandemic many organizations set up food pantries so their employees would not have to expose themselves to the virus in supermarkets. We provided state and federally required Covid related sick time in addition to our own programs of compensated time off, arranging in some cases to send groceries to staff members recovering or quarantining at home. We have complied with state and federal infection control practices and are now maintaining required stockpiles of PPE. Our employees are the essence of what we do in long term care and we reward and respect them for it.

Through resilience, rigid safety standards and creative problem-solving, Connecticut's nursing homes have endured and managed through this pandemic, and we are beginning to emerge from it. Our commitment to treating our residents and keeping them safe continues - that is our mission and the promise we have made to every resident and family. While we are not out of the woods yet, the arrival of the vaccine and the strong response nursing homes have had in vaccinating our residents and staff finally shows the end is now in sight.

But we are gravely concerned about the future viability of our member organizations. The pandemic's financial impact on the aging services field has exacerbated the financial distress of our nursing homes and has exposed long-standing problems with the Medicaid reimbursement system. And now, after a year struggling with extraordinary and continued pandemic-related expenses, the persistent decline in resident census and the accompanying reduction in revenues are pushing nursing home providers to the edge.

Comments on SB 1002, HB 6595, and HB 6478

We do understand the motivation to ensure that all of those who have served and are serving during this pandemic be compensated, rewarded and healed, but we respectfully urge the Committee to not place the financial burden of these legislative proposals onto the providers who have been at the frontline of the battle. In that this is a once in a century, global pandemic, we believe that this unique and catastrophic event should be handled as such by the State. The State can do so by establishing and administering a fitting program of compensation and benefits related specifically to this pandemic and funding the program through anticipated federal Covid-19 relief funds.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

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