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Before the Public Health Committee

In Support of SB 1030 AN ACT CONCERNING LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES With Changes.

Good afternoon Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Beverley Downie, I live in East Hartford, and I have worked at the Newington Rapid Recovery Rehab Center as a CNA for 29 years. I come before you today to urge you to pass SB 1030 with changes.

For 29 years I have worked for NRRRC and have loved the difference I have been able to make in my resident's lives. I find it incredibly rewarding to give care to my residents and see that care aide them in their recovery.

Out of the 29 years I have worked at NRRRC, this past year was by far the worst year I've experienced. The existing issues we were dealing with, such as staffing and PPE supply, were elevated by the pandemic, making my job much harder.

Our staffing levels were incredibly low during the pandemic. We were constantly staffing our nursing home at the bare minimum, which left us vulnerable when staff called out or got sick. When that would happen, the remaining staff must still provide the same level of care with less hands to help. You end up with one person trying to do the job of two people. This leaves staff exhausted and scrambling to get everything done on their shift so it doesn't snowball into the next shift.

Another major issue during the pandemic was the PPE. Our facility was low on PPE, requiring us to reuse PPE, provide our own PPE, or simply go without. Homes like mine did not have an adequate stockpile of PPE. Beyond stockpiling, it is also important for homes to ensure that staff have access to the PPE when they need it. My home had enough PPE during the pandemic, we would have been much more capable of caring for our residents in a safe way.

The proposals in SB 1030 will go a long way in addressing staffing and PPE issues in nursing homes. The increases in staffing in this bill would help cut down on amount of burnout experienced by staff, while also ensuring our units are staffed enough to provide quality care for our residents. Furthermore, SB 1030 would mandate that homes have a stockpile of PPE, which would have saved lives had we had that during the height of the pandemic.

SB 1030 is not perfect though. This bill would increase the length of shifts in homes to 12 hours, which is a horrible idea. Instead of reducing staff burnout, this would increase it. Shifts should stay 8 hours as they are now. This bill also does not go far enough when it comes to stockpiling PPE. Stockpiling three months of PPE is a step in the right direction, but we should be stockpiling at least six months of PPE to truly ensure we are prepared for the next pandemic.

Finally, I am disappointed to see a lack of penalties for nursing homes that do not meet these new standards. We have seen nursing home management violate state standards in the past, and they do so because there aren't enforcement mechanisms in place. Without penalties for noncompliance, how can we guarantee these new standards will be implemented?

I am encouraged by the proposals in SB1030, and thank the committee for raising this bill. With a few tweaks this bill could go a long way in improving the nursing home industry. Nursing home staff and our residents deserve better. Please pass SB 1030.

Thank you for your time.