

Nursing Home and Assisted Living Oversight Working Group (NHALOWG)

Staffing Levels Subcommittee

Meeting Summary

Monday, November 16, 2020, 3:00 PM via Zoom

1. Introductions

- Rep. Michelle Cook convened the meeting and introduced her Co-Chair, Kate McEvoy, from the Department of Social Services. Each member of the Subcommittee introduced themselves, sharing which group or agency they represent, and their enthusiasm for the work this group is charged with undertaking.
- Subcommittee Meeting Schedule: Rep. Cook shared that the group will be meeting from 3:00-4:30 each Monday through January 4th, except there will be no meeting on December 21st. The work of this Subcommittee will be reported back to the main Committee at their Thursday meetings.

2. Identify Topics to Explore, including but not limited to, topics from the Mathematica Report:

- Ensure that facilities adopt appropriate staffing policies to minimize spread of infectious disease (SR 17)
- Increase minimum required staffing ratios; support increases in workers' pay and benefits (LR 14)
- Ensure that staff have access to guaranteed sick time under state's existing paid sick leave regulations (LR 15)

Kate McEvoy shared that the Mathematica report is an important tool, and additional regulatory information will also be necessary, including federal Medicaid law and existing state statutes. She added that it would be helpful to have DPH present guidance and the subcommittee should be looking towards what best practices will look like in a post-pandemic environment as well. Rep. Cook added that she has been advocating to change regulations and improve wages for some time, and she thinks that having as much information as possible is important.

Katie Traber, from 1199, added that there was recently a staffing summit with DSS, DOL and providers, and that data would be useful. Kate McEvoy added that DPH convened the staffing summit and she could obtain a summary from Adelita Orefice, Co-Chair of NHALOWG.

Mag Morelli, of Leading Age, talked about the complexity of nursing home rates, and she added that there are significant costs associated with decreasing staffing ratios and increasing pay and benefits. She raised the issue of workforce recruitment and retention, including leadership administrative positions. Rep. Anne Hughes echoed that a long-term approach should be taken,

looking beyond the pandemic, understanding that long-term care is under-resourced and the prospect of increased costs should not deter the subcommittee. Jean Aranha from CT Legal Services raised several points, including that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) set the staffing ratio of 4.1 hours per resident per day, and CT regulations only currently require 1.9 hours per resident per day, and there have been attempts to change that. She shared other concerns, including the low percentage of workers who are employed full-time, which leads workers to take multiple jobs. This has numerous implications, including increased chance of virus transmission. She added her perspective that testing guidelines should be updated, that support-staffing levels (such as recreational staff and social workers) need to be addressed as well, that transparency about how nursing home dollars are spent is needed, and that she wonders what the long-term plan is for the temporary nurse aide position.

There was further discussion about staffing ratios, testing and transparency. Sandra Arburr of Athena Healthcare, talked about how qualifications of staff have changed over time, and that better training is needed. She shared that an Ambassador Program was in its infancy, assisting with connection and visitation. Discussion ensued about temporary nurses' aides filling the Ambassador role, and about connecting those people who have been trained with job opportunities. There was also discussion about how an increase in full-time staff would provide more stable relationships between staff and residents, improving the quality of care. Katie Traber added that workers need supports, including child care and mental health supports. She talked about the importance of workforce development and recruitment. She noted that as the state moves to more in-home care, those workers also need to be able to provide the same level of care, and should be getting comparable training, support and respect. Kim Sandor of the CT Nurses' Association raised the issue of how nurses in training, needing clinical experiences, have been impacted by the pandemic.

Kate McEvoy summarized the discussion, saying that the three items from the Mathematica Report will be the group's focus, and added that the fourth topic would be workforce retention and recruitment. Rep. Cook added a fifth topic, exploring transparency and communication requirements between staff and family members, and access of essential caregivers. Kate McEvoy said that she would share a Chart Book with relevant background information for the subcommittee by Friday, which would help inform next Monday's discussion.

3. Consideration of subject area experts to invite to present to the subcommittee.

Rep. Cook asked members of the subcommittee to think about what other perspectives need to be heard. Some suggestions were generated, and Rep. Cook asked people to send their ideas to Subcommittee Administrator, Heather Ferguson-Hull.

It was noted that a mechanism is being developed for people to share their stories with NHALOWG. It was also noted that there is overlap between the work of the four subcommittees, and there will be bi-directional sharing between them.

4. Next Meeting – Monday, November 23, 3:00 PM via Zoom