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TESTIMONY

Delivered by Deborah R. Hoyt, President and CEO
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Before the Connecticut General Assembly Bipartisan Task Force on
Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety
Mental Health Subcommittee

January 29, 2013

Good morning Senator Harp, Representative Wood and members of the Mental Health Subcommittee.

My name is Deborah Hoyt, President and CEO of the Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home – formerly the Connecticut Association for Home Care and Hospice.

The Association represents 60 licensed and certified home health and hospice agencies that performed nearly 5-million home and community-based visits throughout inner cities and rural areas of Connecticut last year.

As a growing Connecticut workforce of 11,000 caregivers and skilled nurses, *we* are the *only* health providers that walk through the front doors of 14,000 state residents each day. We manage chronic illness in children and adults, provide high-tech interventions in a person's living room, prevent avoidable hospital readmissions, enable seniors to "age in place", and maintain the behavioral health population in our 169 cities and towns.

Of the 5-million home visits completed last year, approximately 2-million of these visits were to administer physician-ordered mediations (narcotics) to unstable mental health patients to keep them reasonably functional within the community.

As your Subcommittee examines population and community-based safety in your response to the tragic murders in Newtown, it is important that you are aware of the large number of individuals, at one time institutionalized in state-run facilities, now living as our neighbors in every Connecticut town.

In addition to firearms, a real threat to the safety of our citizens is the inadequate reimbursement by the state to our licensed home care agencies -- particularly the 20 agencies that employ psychiatric nurses who risk their own safety on a daily basis to enter the homes of these clients,

assessing daily behavioral changes and ensure that they are complying with their medication regiment.

An army of unsung heroes, these nurses enable individuals with mental health challenges to live at home and be productive members of society, and on a larger scale, enables Connecticut communities to be safer and allow each of us to sleep soundly at night.

Due to state budget constraints, the reimbursement for Medicaid home health services and medication administration is under scrutiny. Four agencies closed their doors last year, as reimbursement didn't cover the costs to provide services. Other agencies are struggling and we will see additional closures.

Home health care and medication administration are the cost effective solution to the state's healthcare, fiscal and community safety challenges.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information today. Please contact me if I can be a resource at any time.