



**March 5, 2019**

***Written testimony of Douglas Melanson, Administrator, Abbott Terrace Health Center, Concerning the Governor's Recommended FY 2020 and FY 2021 Proposed Budget***

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and to the members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Douglas Melanson. I am the Administrator, at Abbott Terrace Health Center in Waterbury, Connecticut. Abbott Terrace Health Center has been providing nursing home care in our community for 33 years. We are a 205 bed nursing home, and we have approximately 300 employees working at our facility.

I want to begin by letting you know how proud I am to be here with some of the key people from our industry. I'm the administrator, but the devoted caregivers, including RNs, LPNs, CNAs, Rehabilitation Therapists, Social Services, Recreation Therapists, Food Services Staff, as well as Maintenance, Housekeeping and Laundry Services staff all want what I want and that is to deliver the highest quality care experience to anyone who comes to Abbott Terrace Health Center. These workers are doing an amazing job, and I am so grateful to them, and proud of them, for everything they are doing. At Abbott Terrace we provide high quality care and services to meet the needs of the residents that live in the community in and around the Waterbury area. Some of these quality services include physical, occupational rehabilitation care and speech language pathology services. Our center provides complex medical services such as dialysis services, tracheotomy, respiratory, wound care, pain management, IV therapy, nutritional management, mental health management and substance abuse support services. The work that the staff performs is challenging but they provide care and service with a high level of dedication and compassion. Most staff would tell you that the residents at Abbott Terrace are like their family and they provide service as if they were caring for their own family.

I am especially proud of the work our nursing home has done during a long period where Connecticut hasn't made nursing home funding a priority.

I fear that our nursing home is now at a critical juncture. That we are clearly at a point where we can't go another year without Connecticut policy makers recognizing that substantial Medicaid help is overdue to assure the quality care we all want to provide.

Prior to coming to work at Abbott Terrace Health Center I had the unfortunate experience of closing a nursing home. This home simply could no longer afford to operate. The vast majority of residents that lived in that other skilled nursing facility had Medicaid as their primary source of payment. It is well known that when a nursing home closes it is very challenging for the residents of the home and their families during and after the transfer process. It is also very difficult on the staff who had worked together as part of a community for so long. Not only did these people lose their jobs, many of them were losing the sense of family that they had built up and relied upon over the years.

Policy makers need to hear loud and clear that delivering the care everyone wants for their loved ones is getting harder and harder to provide. And the reason isn't really hard to understand. There has been almost no additional Medicaid help in the state budget for now over twelve (12) years. Elected leaders need to hear that the nursing home population is older and sicker than it was twenty years ago. We see so much more dementia and Alzheimer's disease than ever before. Today's nursing home resident also have greater behavioral health needs. Mental health and substance use disorders are common on top of the skilled nursing care that today's nursing home residents need. In addition, there are significant pressures from other payment sources to reduce lengths of stay and provided higher quality care for less funding. In 12 years the cost of just about everything has gone up from the cost of labor, the cost of supplies, food, electricity and the cost of repairs and refurbishments and yet our largest source of payment, Medicaid is stagnant.

It is really beyond my ability to understand how our nursing home can compete to retain or recruit staff to serve a more complex population with unemployment so low without more Medicaid help. The minimum wage increases proposed alone will require substantial new Medicaid funding for nursing homes.

Please help us deliver the care we all want and please make long overdue nursing home funding a priority in this year's budget.

On behalf of everyone at Abbott Terrace, thank you for your consideration.



Douglas Melanson, Administrator