



Always Caring

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RE: Public Hearing

SUBJECT: Nursing homes, assisted living, home health care and COVID-19

Dear Ms. Sheridan,

I am sending the following comments as testimony for the above referenced hearings. United Helpers (www.unitedhelpers.org) was founded in 1898 and provides a complete continuum of post-acute services. We serve over 2,400 people daily at 52 locations in St. Lawrence and Jefferson County. I have included a map indicating our location in NYS. St. Lawrence County is the largest county in NYS and home to only 110,000 residents.

While many nursing homes and assisted living facilities struggle financially and experience similar challenges, I will also speak to our unique market and challenges.

- **No Medicaid trend factor since 2008 – Imagine 82% of your revenue frozen for 12 years**
- **Very high Medicaid population**
- **Managed Medicaid has increased costs and reduced cash flow**
- **Historic suburban and urban rate additions are not provided to rural providers**
- **Reimbursement rates significantly below hospitals, counties, and NYS operations making recruitment and retention nearly impossible**
- **Many unfunded mandates without reimbursement like mandatory minimum wage**
- **Critical access hospitals take needed Medicare business**
- **Too many acute care beds resulting in hospitals taking needed nursing home business**
- **Severe nursing shortage even compared to suburban and urban markets**

In summary, skilled nursing and assisted living operators have seen their customers' acuity increase dramatically, NYS demands and mandates increase, NYS oversight become more punitive while at the same time allowing for-profit operators in poor standing to continue to expand and payer systems become more complex all while reimbursement has stayed flat for over a decade.

Skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities play a key part in NYS's continuum of care and they will continue to do so in the future. In many cases, they are the best and most cost-effective choice. COVID-19 has laid bare many of the challenges, bottlenecks and funding inequities that have been festering for years.

It is time for operators, NYS DOH and legislators to come together and fix these long-standing problems instead of blaming operators for systemic issues. For example, the nursing shortage presents challenges for every healthcare provider in NYS. While over 30 states utilize medication aides in nursing homes, NYS does not. If every nursing home utilized 10 medication aides in NYS, 6,000 nurses, who pass medications, would be available to fill many necessary positions. In addition, the newly created medication aide position would provide career opportunities for our most qualified certified nursing assistants. Let us start innovating and focus on outcomes instead of process.

Thank you for convening these very important hearings.

I can be reached by cell phone, [REDACTED], if you have questions or need further clarification