



OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
332 Dirksen Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

December 1, 2022

Dear Senator Sanders:

I am writing to encourage you to join Senator Leahy and Congressman Welch in support of S.4605/ H.R. 8581, known as the Preserving Access to Home Health Act of 2022, which aims to delay until 2026 cuts to reimbursement for home health care services provided by Medicare-certified agencies nationwide, including one in our community, Central Vermont Home Health & Hospice (CVHHH). In October, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services released its final payment rule, which reduces Medicare payments for home health care services by 7.85% over the next two calendar years. The cuts come at a time when CVHHH and nonprofit home care providers in Vermont and nationwide are under intense financial pressure stemming from workforce shortages exacerbated by the pandemic. The goal for home health care service providers is to get this bill passed before January 2023.

In September, I met with CVHHH's leadership, including CEO Sandy Rouse, COO Kim LaGue, PT, and Complex Care Coordinator, Aimil Parmelee, OT, at their headquarters in Berlin. CVHHH cares for residents of 23 communities in Washington and Orange Counties, Vermont by bringing a range of skilled medical care, supports, and education to people at home. CVHHH cares for people of all ages and at all stages of life. They employ about 150 individuals, including registered nurses and nurse's aides, licensed rehab therapists, medical social workers, case managers, administrative staff, and personal care attendants. In 2021, CVHHH cared for over 3,000 patients, and they made over 45,000 homecare (skilled care) visits. This is in addition to tens of thousands of visits through their hospice, long-term care, and maternal-child health programs for a total of over 74,000 visits organization wide. This is a 10% increase from 2021. CVHHH is one of nine nonprofit Visiting Nurse Associations (VNAs) in Vermont that makes access to care available to every Vermonter, regardless of their ability to pay or their insurance status.

Ms. Rouse shared that the Medicare cuts are equivalent to over \$500,000 in lost operating revenue between 2023 and 2024. To provide context for why this loss matters, 80% of CVHHH's operating revenue comes from Medicare and Medicaid payments, which are non-negotiable, and 80% of CVHHH's operating expenses cover employee salaries, benefits, and mileage reimbursement. Currently, the organization operates at a break-even before any of the

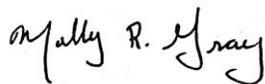
care coordination of the multiple social risk factors of health are addressed for CVHHH's patients. \$500,000 in lost revenue disallows CVHHH to pay competitive wages and benefits and puts unnecessary and untimely strain on CVHHH to attract qualified, career-oriented clinicians. The situation is unsustainable. The projected loss of Medicare revenue for the VNA system in Vermont, which is about 70% funded by Medicare, is projected at over \$3 million.

During my meeting with Ms. Rousse, Ms. LaGue, and Ms. Parmelee, I learned that CVHHH never closed its doors during the pandemic. While other local healthcare providers limited in-person patient visits, CVHHH clinicians and staff provided in-person care across all its programs and admitted COVID-positive individuals. They expanded their telehealth program to provide check ins with clients while mitigating risk. CVHHH also spearheaded local community distribution of COVID tests and vaccinations with Waterbury Ambulance and provided onsite care for individuals living in transitional and temporary housing. CVHHH and its EMS counterparts, along with other community providers, strengthened coordination efforts and communication around patients and individuals in the community with complex care needs to ensure EMS staff were available for true emergencies. In Barre City, unnecessary EMS calls were reduced, and this work continues.

CVHHH is a vital community-based healthcare provider whose work is directly aligned with the goals of health reform in Vermont. Care is individualized and based on a person's unique needs and goals, and it is provided in the lowest-cost setting. This saves patients and the broader healthcare system money and improves people's health-related quality of life.

I believe the Medicare home care cuts would have a detrimental impact on Vermonters in Central Vermont and statewide. Your support at the federal level to at least put on hold these drastic cuts is critical now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Molly R. Gray".

Molly Gray

Vermont Lieutenant Governor

CC:

Senator, Patrick Leahy
Congressman, Peter Welch
Congresswoman-elect, Becca Balint