



DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

March 11, 2025

The Honorable Ken Weyler
And Members of the House Finance Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 210
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Re: HB 1 (Biennial State Operating Budget)

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

As the Director of the Office of Public Policy of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Manchester, I write on behalf of Bishop Peter Libasci of the Diocese of Manchester and Thomas Blonski, the President/CEO of Catholic Charities NH, to respectfully register our comments on HB 1. We believe that the Catholic Church in New Hampshire is the largest non-governmental provider of charitable assistance in New Hampshire, and it is against that background that we submit these comments.

As a general matter, I first of all want to ask that you approach all your decisions on the budget through the lens of a preeminent priority for the poor. As you undoubtedly have heard us say in other contexts, the principles of human dignity and the common good are the foundation stones of our society. The aspects of the budget that furnish care for those in need (especially in the areas of health care, housing, and food) should be seen as the most important parts of any state budget. We respectfully urge that these parts of the budget be funded first and that they be funded completely.

I would like to take this opportunity to address just one of those areas, the portions of HB 1 that address long term care.

Almost by definition, the elders among us who qualify for the nursing home level of Medicaid care are among the poorest and sickest of our fellow citizens. Because society often views the value of a person through the lens of physical and mental vigor and health, our seniors are greatly at the mercy of what Pope Francis often calls the “throwaway society” which routinely disposes of people and things that are no longer perceived as having any utilitarian value.

The existential challenges facing long term care providers in New Hampshire already have been extensively laid out for the legislature by the NH Health Care Association. Our own perspective on this issue is based on the experiences of Catholic Charities NH, which operates six nursing homes with 382 beds in the aggregate (making CCNH second only to

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the Counties as a nonprofit provider of nursing home care). CCNH calculates that the Medicaid funding shortfall in CCNH facilities amounts to \$8-10 million annually. At present, about 40 of the CCNH beds are unfilled. Staffing challenges force nursing homes to turn to more expensive agency-based staffing solutions.

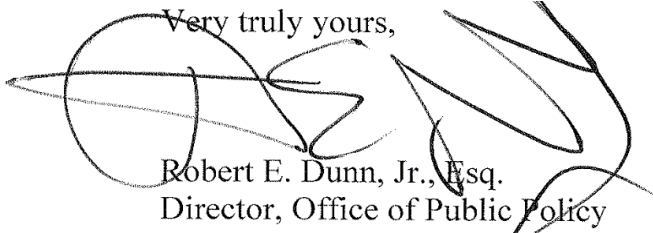
As you probably know, the statewide staffing challenges in nursing homes have contributed to a logjam that impacts other parts of the long-term care system and hospitals as well. Thus, the issue of nursing home funding resonates in areas beyond the nursing homes themselves. Adequate funding of nursing homes and the rest of the long term care continuum will have a benefit for other parts of the health care system.

In addressing the data from the institutional point of view, I do not want to ignore the most important perspective of all – the perspective of the individuals who live in New Hampshire nursing homes. As Bishop Libasci said in another context several years ago: “Although these brothers and sisters of ours may be old and frail, they are not anonymous. They lived through the Great Depression and fought in World War II. They lost siblings in Korea and children in Viet Nam. They were our teachers and nurses. They built our roads and produced our food.”

I hope that these people will be at the very forefront of your minds as you make your decisions on the budget. Those decisions will dictate what happens at the actual bedsides of these fellow Granite Staters. Those decisions will determine in a very real way how these people will spend the remaining months of their lives.

Therefore, I would respectfully request that you fund the entire long-term care system at levels that will ensure that New Hampshire residents who qualify for Medicaid have access to the care to which they are entitled, whether under the law or simply in accordance with the moral obligations we owe to our elders in need.

Thank you for your kind consideration of our views.

Very truly yours,

Robert E. Dunn, Jr., Esq.
Director, Office of Public Policy