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**Subject: Support for H-5257 – A Holistic Approach to Addressing the Nursing Home Care Crisis through the Establishment of a Nursing Home Workforce Standards Advisory Board**

Chair Donovan and the Honorable Members of the House Health & Human Services Committee,

SEIU 1199NE, in proud partnership with the Raise the Bar (RTB) on Resident Care Coalition, submits this testimony in strong support of Bill H-5257. This identical measure—which passed the House overwhelmingly last year—was vetoed by Governor McKee, despite his public commitments to improve healthcare outcomes. With the crisis in Rhode Island’s nursing homes intensifying, swift legislative action is essential.

### **The Current State of Nursing Homes in Rhode Island**

Over the past five years, our nursing home industry has received roughly \$200 million in public funds. Yet, despite this infusion of taxpayer dollars, Rhode Island now ranks as the 2nd worst state in the nation for serious nursing home deficiencies. The landscape is dominated by for-profit chains—often managed by out-of-state entities—that prioritize profit over the care and dignity our residents deserve.

A glaring example is Marquis, an out-of-state for-profit private equity chain that continues to generate multi-million dollar profits while operating some of the worst-rated facilities in the state. This reality exposes a system in which profit maximization undermines resident care and safety.

### **Workforce Challenges and Shifting Resident Needs**

The crisis extends to the very heart of care delivery. Although Rhode Island has over 18,000 licensed Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), an alarming exodus of nearly 12,000 CNAs has left those remaining under severe strain—with almost half living in poverty. The chronic undervaluation of these essential frontline workers has precipitated an exodus that directly compromises resident care.

Moreover, the resident profile in nursing homes has evolved. Facilities that once served primarily elderly individuals are increasingly caring for younger people facing mental health, behavioral health, and substance use challenges. Without proper training and specialized support, this blending of populations creates dangerous conditions for all residents.

### **A Data-Driven, Inclusive Path Forward**

Bill H-5257 proposes the establishment of a Nursing Home Workforce Standards Advisory Board—a 13-member panel that embodies all key stakeholders, ensuring a holistic and equitable approach to reform. The board will include:

- **Government Representatives:** Key officials or their designees from the Department of Health, the Department of Labor and Training, and the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman.
- **Industry Stakeholders:** Six members drawn equally from nursing home employers and frontline direct care staff, appointed by the Governor, the Speaker of the House, and the Senate President.
- **Workforce Training Experts:** One member from a joint labor-management training fund to provide critical insights on ongoing education and workforce development.
- **Community and Resident Voices:** Two members from community organizations representing Medicaid recipients and nursing home residents—voices that have historically been excluded from these discussions.

The Advisory Board will make data-driven recommendations to the General Assembly on several critical fronts:

- **Training Standards:** Enhancing professional development programs so that staff are equipped to manage both traditional elder care and the increasingly complex needs of younger residents with mental and behavioral health challenges.
- **Recommended Wages:** Establishing fair wage standards through rigorous scrutiny of the financial and payroll reports of nursing home operators. This analysis will ensure that compensation accurately reflects the demands of quality care and holds profit-driven operators accountable.

- **Depoliticized Decision-Making:** Prioritizing data and expert insight over political pressure to ensure that policies are made in the best interests of residents and caregivers alike.

### **Addressing Industry Misconceptions**

It is important to counter the industry's narrative that passing this bill will lead to more nursing home closures. Evidence shows that when care standards are elevated and operators are held accountable through transparent financial analysis, quality of care improves. Enhanced training and fair wage practices do not precipitate closures—instead, they create a more sustainable environment that benefits residents, preserves existing facilities, and builds a stronger workforce.

### **The Imperative for Immediate Legislative Action**

Governor McKee's veto of last year's identical, overwhelmingly passed measure has left our residents and dedicated care workers in a perilous situation. With rampant deficiencies, evolving resident needs, and a workforce facing an exodus, legislative inaction is not an option. Bill H-5257 is not merely a policy proposal—it is a moral imperative to restore dignity and quality care in our nursing homes.

By establishing the Nursing Home Workforce Standards Advisory Board, Rhode Island can realign its priorities—ensuring that public funds are used to elevate care standards and that financial reports are rigorously analyzed to set equitable wages for our indispensable CNAs and other direct care staff. SEIU 1199NE, together with our partners in the Raise The Bar on Resident Care Coalition, stands united in calling for the immediate passage of Bill H-5257.

Together, we can build a future where every nursing home in Rhode Island is a safe, dignified, and compassionate place for all residents—and where our caregivers receive the respect and fair compensation they rightfully deserve.

Respectfully,

Alex Moore

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