September 21, 2023

RE: KABC Testimony Special Committee on Nursing Facility Reimbursement Rate Methodology

Members of the Committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. We appreciate the Legislature’s efforts to consider the needs of aging Kansans through this committee and the recent Senior Care Task Force. Your attentiveness to exploring options to adequately fund healthcare and long term support services is a cornerstone of these efforts. Recognizing the challenges ahead, we must thoughtfully use our limited resources to care for older adults, especially those who need the highest levels of care.

It’s Time for Comprehensive Reform: By 2030, less than 7 years from now, more than 20% of Kansas citizens will be 65 years old or older. An overview of current resources shows more than a third of our adult care facilities don’t have adequate staff to meet the needs of their current residents, making staffing shortages Priority One. It is well-documented that recruiting and retaining a trained workforce is the heart of nearly all long term care quality measures including the overuse of antipsychotic drugs, a metric that Kansas continues to struggle with improving because of the staffing shortage.

This committee has an opportunity to set the stage for a comprehensive reform of long term care funding. Reform should include a long term investment in community-based services as well as institutional care. It’s a multi-faceted challenge; nursing facilities must look for solutions to workforce issues at the same time the number of older Kansans continues to grow, the number of Kansans with Alzheimer’s grows and costs continue to rise. We believe Kansas must look at a diversification of long-term care funding to better utilize community-based care services to lead to more better outcomes for all older adults.

Measuring Outcomes: A number of quality measures show areas for improvements in Kansas long term care. Most of those quality indicators are linked directly to adequate staffing in a facility. Since a recent study ranks Kansas as 46th in facilities with staff shortages, building a strong workforce should be Priority One. (1)

The data strongly suggests our current piecemeal approach to long-term care drives older Kansans prematurely into nursing facilities. Currently, Kansas ranks 47th in the nation for low care nursing facility residents. (2) What does this mean? Simply, a low-care resident requires minimal assistance with their activities of daily living but may need more help than available in a home setting. Low-care residents require less physical assistance with activities of daily living such as getting in and out of bed, transferring, going to the restroom, or eating. Kansas has a higher than average proportion of residents in nursing facilities who could be served in the community if services were available. Increased investments in home and community-based services would delay the need for persons needing institutional care, or they may
be able to avoid it altogether. Limited facility staff and funding resources would then be directed toward those who need the most care.

We know that as Kansans age, the demand for skilled care will increase, but the cost of institutional care may be out of reach for many. On average, the cost of care in an assisted living is $4,859 a month ($58,308/year). The cost of nursing home care ranges from $6,679 a month ($80,148/year) for a semi-private room to $7,228 a month ($86,736/year) for a private room. The average cost of a home health aide at $4,955 a month ($59,460/year) is comparable to assisted living but supports the person to live where they want to live – at home.(3)

We believe restoring case management to the KanCare Frail Elderly, Physically Disabled and Brain Injury waivers would be an investment in strengthening the system of long term care supports and services for older adults. Case management services would support older Kansans in managing their in-home care needs reducing the need for institutional care.

As we examine long term care funding streams, it is important that we direct our state’s limited resources into improved patient outcomes. During this time of severe staff shortages, limited nursing home resources should be focused on those residents who need skilled care. We ask this committee to prioritize a data-driven approach that ties funding to specific demonstrated benchmarks in patient care, safety, and quality. It is essential to ensure that any increase in funding is tied to demonstrated improvements and best practice in patient care and facility standards.

I urge the committee to carefully consider proposals that grow the workforce both in institutional settings and within the community, balance long term supports and services and demonstrate improvement in patient care. It is essential to approach this opportunity for reform with a balanced perspective, considering the potential consequences and the needs of older Kansans. KABC stands ready to help rebalance the long term care options to support all older adults in Kansas. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Daniel Goodman

Daniel Goodman
Executive Director
Kansas Advocates for Better Care

Kansas Advocates for Better Care. A statewide, non-profit organization dedicated to improving long-term care for older Kansans at-home and in adult care facilities since 1975.