

November 29, 2021

I would like to thank the members of the General Government Budget Committee for the opportunity to testify regarding House Bill 218.

Crandall Medical Center is a faith based non-profit, 176 bed, Medicaid and Medicare certified skilled nursing facility in Mahoning County with a strong history of high quality care as part of the greater Copeland Oaks Retirement Community.

The healthcare industry has endured numerous issues that have affected staffing and resident care throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, Crandall Medical Center operated with a direct care staffing ratio roughly 25% higher than the state average. Several employees chose to leave healthcare upon Ohio having its first known COVID-19 case. Those that stayed and fought this virus have been true heroes. They have gone above and beyond, at great personal risk, to ensure our residents received care when it was most needed. We continue to stress the importance of the vaccine and all of our employees have received an abundance of education on all aspects of COVID-19, including the safety and efficacy of the vaccine. They have seen the risks and all outcomes. They deserve to have a voice, with the option to receive or not receive a vaccine that may fight off a virus they have been staring in the face for nearly two years.

In spite of dramatic hourly pay-rate increases, many have continued to exit the healthcare workforce. In order to have enough staff to meet resident needs, we have had no choice but to contract with several staffing agencies. Availability has become extremely limited within these agencies, and often times do not meet the consistency of care that our residents deserve.

Because resident safety and care are our first priorities, we have had to consolidate to one floor from two. Subsequently, we have had to limit outside admissions – maintaining occupancy of 60 to 70 percent - well below our usual normal rate of occupancy as we do not have the staff available to provide the care that our residents deserve. This sadly causes members of our local rural community to seek caregivers further from their homes, families and friends.

We have lost nearly 30% of our employees since the start of the pandemic. The recent vaccine mandate could potentially result in the loss of many more. If our employees are forced to take this vaccine, many have stated that they will leave healthcare altogether. This means that years of experience, compassion and hard work would be exiting the workforce at a time it is needed the most. COVID-19 is not the only threat our residents face; not having the necessary staff can lead to more falls, skin breakdown, depression, etc.

We also recognize that this mandate is not only going to affect healthcare, but many supply chain businesses that healthcare providers depend on. We cannot do our job without the availability of necessary food, equipment and supplies.

Our employees have fought this fight. They have learned so much about this virus, and should have the option to continue that fight with a vaccine exemption based on their personal convictions.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

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