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LTC wage-hike effort headed for run-in with state minimum staffing proposal

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Many states' nursing facilities are facing extremely difficult operating conditions, but Connecticut's nursing homes are staring down double barrels that could make it increasingly hard for them to stay in business.

State lawmakers recently introduced legislation to increase the mandatory nursing hours per resident per day from 3 hours to 4.1 hours. That bill also includes provisions to submit narrative-form expenditure reports and disclose the name of any private equity firms that hold an ownership stake in a facility. Providers must also deliver the quarterly statements that a firm sends to its investors that include fees, expenses, and performance, according to local media reports. Facilities can be fined up to \$10,000 per violation for failing to use “plain-language explanations” in their narratives.

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The president of LeadingAge Connecticut, though, said that the “highly prescriptive staffing ratio” does not mesh with the varying needs and conditions of nursing home residents.

“We are very concerned about highly prescriptive staffing ratio requirements,” Mag Morelli told *McKnight's Long Term Care News* on Tuesday. “To mandate specific ratios of CNA, RN and LPN staffing within an overall minimum goes against the concept of flexing your staffing to meet the needs of the resident and does not align with our state's new acuity-based reimbursement system.”

Meanwhile, nursing home employees are organizing with SEIU 1199NE to push for a \$25 hourly wage by 2025. Union President Rob Baril said the wage hike plus retirement and healthcare benefits would cost \$700 million, which he suggested should come from the state's \$3 billion surplus.

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“People are going to tell us that we are crazy,” Baril said, [according](#) to CT NewsJunkie. “I don’t believe that the idea of ending poverty for long term care workers is crazy.”

Matt Barrett, president and CEO of the Connecticut Association of Health Care Facilities, said the sector shares the goals of [increasing staffing hours](#) and boosting wages but questioned how those initiatives would be funded.

“Connecticut, absolutely, must invest in this critically important workforce now,” Barrett said in a statement to *McKnights* on Tuesday. “It is very clear [that] our state will not have enough employees to care for our seniors when they need care the most if we don’t create and pay for a pathway to boost pay now and over the next several years.”

He also said that providers are doing “everything they can” to recruit and retain staff, but facilities do not have the staff to meet a more ambitious nursing-hours mandate. Many facilities have trouble meeting the current 3-hour requirement, he added.

Nursing homes continue to struggle mightily against pandemic-related job losses plus “ravaging inflation” and higher costs, Barrett said.

“Focus and attention must also be on the extraordinary strain and instability the now three-years-long COVID-19 public health emergency has caused on the staff, operators, and residents,” he told *McKnights*. “It will matter little to boost the pay of these deserving employees if the healthcare sector is allowed to fail and these critically important jobs are lost.”

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