



## DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

March 10, 2023

The Honorable Ken Weyler, Chair  
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, and on behalf of both Bishop Peter Libasci of the Diocese of Manchester and Thomas Blonski, the President/CEO of Catholic Charities NH, I write to respectfully register our comments on HB 1. We believe that the Catholic Church in New Hampshire is the state's largest non-governmental provider of charitable assistance to those in need, and it is in that light that we offer the following.

As a general matter, I want to ask first of all 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. These principles are not just religious concepts; they are the heart of the constitutional order left us by the framers of the state and federal constitutions. *See* N.H Const. Part 1 Art. 1 (government is "instituted for the general good"); Part 2 Art. 83 (among the duties of the legislature are "to countenance and inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence [and] public and private charity").

Thus, 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 the state budget. We respectfully urge that these parts of the budget be funded first and that they completely address the needs that exist.

I will speak here to just one of those areas: the portions of HB 1 that deal with long term care. Almost by definition, the elders 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 health and vigor, our seniors (especially if they are poor) are greatly at the mercy of what Pope Francis often calls the "throwaway culture" which routinely disposes of people and things that are not perceived as having any utilitarian value.

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The existential challenges that face long term care providers in New Hampshire have been well laid out for Division 3 by Brendan Williams of NHHCA. Our own experience of this crisis is informed by the work of Catholic Charities NH, which operates six nursing homes that have 380 beds in all (this makes CCNH second only to 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. In CCNH facilities, there are fully 50 beds that are unfilled due to the acute staffing shortages.

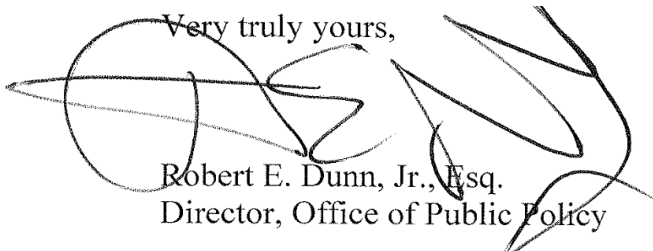
Obviously, this is a situation that is absolutely unsustainable. And it has resonances that extend beyond the nursing homes themselves, because the statewide nursing home staffing shortages have created a logjam that impacts other parts of the health care system.

In setting out numbers, I do not want to ignore the most important consideration 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.”

These are the people that I hope you will have at the very forefront of your minds as you make your decisions on the budget, because your decisions will dictate what happens at thousands of bedsides around the state. Your decisions will determine in a very real way how these New Hampshire seniors will spend the remaining years or months of their lives.

Therefore, **I would respectfully echo NHHCA’s request that nursing home rates be increased by 15%**, and 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 that we as human beings owe to elders who need our help.

Thank you for your kind consideration of our views.

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