

Patti Shaw, Admin. Specialist 1
Re: SB 5529, APD

Co-Chairs Bates and Nathanson:

I am an Administrative Specialist at DHS with the Office of Licensing and Regulatory Oversight (OLRO) in the Salem Client Care Monitoring Unit (CCMU). CCMU staff oversee compliance of federal and state rules and regulations for 140 long-term care nursing facilities and 465 community based care facilities to ensure seniors and people with disabilities, both clients and non-clients, are healthy, safe, living as independently as possible, and are receiving quality care while residing at these facilities.

Audit surveys are completed for state licensure, federal recertification, and complaint investigations. Client Care Surveyors conduct on-site audits and write reports of findings of deficient practice; Support Staff, such as myself, assist in the processing and distribution of the survey report according to State and Federal timelines and required survey intervals.

Past budget cuts and hiring freezes have negatively impacted CCMU staff retention and training and have created expanded workloads for surveyors and support staff alike, creating stress, burnout, low morale, increased use of sick leave, and job resignation. Two weeks ago, a highly skilled registered nurse surveyor resigned unexpectedly, stating to me, "I just can't do this anymore." I have heard other staff speak of job searching and resignation. New hires have resigned halfway through training. In recent months, CCMU gained three new hires and lost three experienced staff, setting us farther back with untrained staff. Lack of adequate staffing has reduced available experienced staff to train new hires and has negatively impacted the training program.

While CCMU has been granted a few exceptions for hiring Surveyor positions, there has been no consideration for replacement of two vacant Support Staff positions whose workload was redistributed to other support staff, bogging down productivity, creating backlog, reducing available time for supporting the needs of professional staff, and hindering other routine office operation duties.

Current staffing levels have impacted staff availability for both state and federal surveys, causing CCMU to fall behind required survey intervals. Survey teams are pushed hard to return to the field to begin new survey audits before completing report writing on facilities from which they just returned.

If survey intervals for federal recertification and state licensure fall behind, federal fines may be imposed and grants lost. When facilities are not assessed in a timely manner, deficient practices may put client residents at risk. Complaint investigations have more than doubled in the past few years, but staffing levels have not. Reduced staffing levels prevent adequate and timely staffing of complaint investigation surveys; this causes investigations to be set aside until staff is available. Delayed oversight and intervention of deficient facility practice will cause continued risk to the safety of vulnerable client residents and prompts negative public perception and lawsuits.

While OLRO and CCMU actively embrace and implement the principles of the Lean Daily Management System, this process alone cannot compensate for the necessary professional and support staff positions required to perform and sustain the work that we do to protect our most vulnerable clients. I fear that additional cuts to the DHS budget would mean additional staffing cuts and hiring freezes, increased backlog of workload, increased strain on an already stressed workforce, loss of experienced staff due to stress, burnout, and lack of job satisfaction. This cycle will continue to disrupt service to DHS clients. Thank you for your time and for allowing me to share my concerns regarding additional cuts to the DHS budget.