

GRANITE STATE HOME HEALTH & HOSPICE ASSOCIATION

Testimony for the Select Committee on 2020 Emergency Election Support

May 13, 2020

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I'm Gina Balkus, CEO of the Home Care, Hospice & Palliative Care Alliance of New Hampshire, and its advocacy affiliate, the Granite State Home Health & Hospice Association. Attorney Hanna invited me to speak with you about how home health and hospice workers might assist in sharing information about voter registration and absentee ballots.

Our organization represents 39 home care and hospice agencies and 4 hospital-based palliative care programs throughout the state. Our members range from small, privately-owned agencies with less than 20 employees to locally-owned franchises of national companies, from Visiting Nurse Associations that have existed for over 100 years to Medicaid-only entities with over 500 employees. Depending on the type of services offered, home care and hospice staff may include nurses, physical, occupational and speech therapists, licensed nursing assistants, personal care service providers, homemakers, and hospice volunteers. Last year, we cared for nearly 50,000 clients in New Hampshire.

The individuals served are generally homebound and need medical care or assistance with activities of daily living. Under normal circumstances, many of our clients may not have the ability to go to the polls to vote. In this pandemic, it's even more difficult. Most of our clients are older adults and have chronic medical conditions, so they are at greater risk if they become infected with COVID-19.

In 2016, our organization participated in a national effort called Bring the Vote Home. It was a non-partisan initiative sponsored by the Partnership for Quality Home Healthcare, an organization of national home care companies working on Medicare and Medicaid policy. Bring the Vote Home was launched to help senior citizens, disabled Americans, their family members, and their home healthcare clinicians participate in elections by offering them tools to register to vote and access absentee ballots. State home care associations across the country were involved in this effort.

Our Alliance created a simple postcard that our member agencies could include in their admission packets for clients. The postcard included a link to a featured page on our website; <https://homecarenh.org/BringTheVoteHome/>. The page linked users to the NH Secretary of State's website.

The links included:

- How to register to vote in NH
- Information for voters with disabilities
- How to find city and town clerk information
- The absentee ballot request form
- How to check the status of your absentee ballot

Our page also included a video from the Bring the Vote Home organization about why it is important for seniors to vote and a NH Fact Sheet on Health Care.

Participation in the project was voluntary for our member agencies. Those that were interested agreed that their involvement would be limited to distributing the postcard. They did not assist patients with completing any forms or ballots. We believe that would be inappropriate and to be honest, when our caregivers are with the client, they are completely focused on patient care. I have no data on how many agencies distributed the postcard to clients or how many hits our webpage received.

I wanted to share the Bring Home the Vote model because its one example of how health care providers might spread the word to homebound clients about voting in elections. If the state were to develop a similar campaign, the Alliance and our members would certainly consider participating. Everyone's voices matter and their votes should count.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I'm happy to answer any questions.