



**Senate Aging & Youth and Health & Human Services Committees
Joint Public Hearing on Nursing Homes and the Challenges during COVID-19
May 7, 2020**

Thank you, Chairman Ward, Chairman Collett, Chairman Brooks, Chairman Haywood and members of the Senate Aging & Youth and Health & Human Services Committees for convening an informational hearing on the challenges of COVID-19 in nursing homes. The Center for Advocacy for the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (CARIE) and Community Legal Services of Philadelphia (CLS) appreciate your consideration of this written statement.

We are failing residents and staff in long term-care facilities and we all must take immediate action to mitigate the death and suffering that is happening as a result of COVID-19. There is no doubt that residents and staff of long-term care facilities are facing incredible challenges and suffering disproportionately during the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent [Op-Ed in *The Hill*](#) summarized best: "It doesn't take an epidemiologist to reach the following conclusion: providing extraordinary resources to protect people in nursing homes and assisted living, who are both at very high risk and easily located, could reduce COVID-19 deaths dramatically, perhaps by as much as 60 percent in states and around the world. This simple fact, however, has been tragically ignored. To date, most calls for action, plans, and protocols focus on personal distancing, increasing critical care capacity, and antibody testing and enhanced surveillance measures. Yet these proposed measures will have minimal effect on long-term care residents."

While we appreciate Pennsylvania state agencies' officials attempts to address needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Pennsylvania's response, and quite frankly the nation's response, is woefully inadequate when it comes to long-term care facilities. This fact is evident in that 67% of Pennsylvania's COVID-19 related deaths are tragically among residents of long-term care facilities. We also genuinely appreciate the heroic efforts and sacrifices being made by long-term care facilities and their staff. However, long-term care facilities cannot and should not be expected to respond alone or without additional resources.

CARIE and CLS wrote the attached [letter to Governor Wolf](#) with the support of numerous signatories but have yet to receive a response. We hope you will review and consider the following recommendations:

- **Require Transparency and Public Disclosure.**
- **Establish a COVID-19 Response Team;**
- **Engage Residents and Families or Representatives in Discussions About Proposed Moves or Transfers;**
- **Establish Distinct COVID-19-Only Units or Facilities;**
- **Provide Adequate PPE and Testing;**
- **Test All Residents and Staff;**
- **Enhance Monitoring of Staffing to Ensure Needs are Met;**
- **Support Direct Caregivers;**
- **Ensure that the needs of people with Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Disorders (ADRD) are addressed;**
- **Issue guidance for facilities to facilitate timely communication among residents, families, friends, ombudsman, and other advocates;**
- **Track outcomes for all residents; and,**
- **Preserve the rights of nursing home residents.**

Residents and staff of long-term care facilities deserve our focused attention and targeted action to make it through this pandemic now to address current issues as well as in the future to ensure we do not repeat this tragedy.

Mounting a massive, targeted response in long-term care facilities will help reduce deaths and lessen reliance on our hospital systems. Anything you can do to help advance our recommendations or take additional measures to protect this vulnerable population is most appreciated. We are available to discuss this important matter with you. Please contact Kathy Cubit at cubit@carie.org for more information or assistance. Thank you in advance for your attention to these urgent matters.

Respectfully Submitted,

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