

The Democratic Caucus



Senate of Pennsylvania

August 20, 2021

Acting Secretary Alison Beam
Department of Health
Health & Welfare Building, 8th Floor West
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Secretary Beam,

We are writing in support of the Department of Health's proposed nursing home regulations, which would require a minimum of 4.1 hours of resident care per day in every skilled nursing facility in Pennsylvania.

The tragedy which has unfolded in Pennsylvania's nursing homes in the past 18 months revealed profound weaknesses in the state's long-term care system, all of which predate the pandemic. None of those weaknesses is more critical than that of understaffing. Research has shown that adequate staffing is critical to ensure high-quality care and dignity for nursing home residents--yet too many facilities in our state are under-staffed. Chronic understaffing meant that nursing homes were unprepared to meet the challenges of the pandemic; it also contributed to the poor working conditions and high turnover which have plagued this industry for decades and which further weakened our system's resilience in the face of Covid-19.

Over 13,000 of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable residents have died in our nursing homes, and we have heard from constituents, family members, and caregivers across the state say loud and clear that this must never be allowed to happen again, and that returning to the status quo is unacceptable. We join with them in applauding the Department's decision to call for 4.1 hours of care per resident-day, and we urge the Department to maintain this high standard of care in its final regulations.

We further call on the Department to specify that hours of care be defined to include only the staff who provide direct resident care.

Finally, given reports that some nursing facilities are evading existing regulations, we call on the Department to ensure clear enforcement of these regulations and accountability for facilities that fail to provide high-quality care.

We understand that achieving adequate staffing will require investment on the part of state government -- both to pay for more staff and to raise wages in the long-term care industry



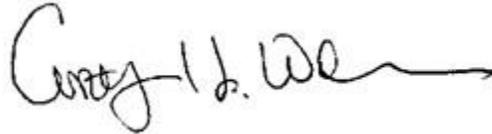
to attract committed caregivers, many of whom have left the bedside due to inadequate pay and poor working conditions. In particular, the reimbursement rates for county owned facilities need to be increased as the rate for Medicare patients is already too low for the current staffing requirements. The General Assembly must step up to provide more resources to back up this improved staffing requirement.

We look forward to working with our colleagues in the legislature and Governor Wolf to make sure that these regulations are fully funded. To do so, we will work in partnership with the Department of Health to ensure that any new funding flows to the bedside and represents an investment in quality care. Regulations requiring safe staffing are the first step to this goal, and we join advocates across the state in fully supporting the Department's proposal to implement 4.1 staffing as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Senator Jay Costa, Democratic Leader
43rd District



Senator Anthony H. Williams, Democratic Whip
8th District



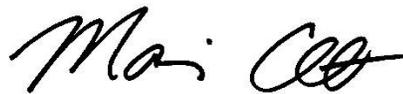
Senator Vincent Hughes
7th District



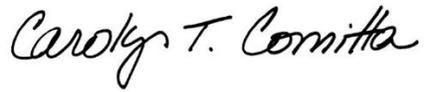
Senator Jim Brewster
45th District



Senator Amanda Cappelletti
17th District



Senator Maria Collett
12th Senate District



Senator Carolyn Comitta
19th District



Senator Marty Flynn
22nd District



Senator Wayne Fontana
42nd District



Senator Art Haywood
4th District



Senator John Kane
9th District



Senator Tim Kearney
26th District



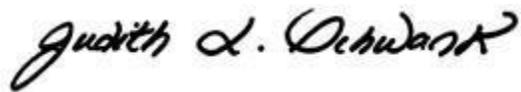
Senator Katie Muth
44th District



Senator Steve Santarsiero
10th District



Senator Nikil Saval
1st District



Senator Judy Schwank
11th District



Senator Sharif Street
3rd District



Senator Christine Tartaglione
2nd District



Senator Lindsey Williams
38th District