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COUNCILMEMBER AT-LARGE

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA  
CITY COUNCIL



August 25, 2021

Alison Beam, Acting Secretary of Health  
Pennsylvania Department of Health  
Health and Welfare Building  
8th Floor West  
625 Forster Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Secretary Beam,

As an At-Large member of Philadelphia's City Council, I am writing in support of the Department of Health's proposed change in nursing home regulations, which would require a minimum of 4.1 hours of resident care per day in every skilled nursing facility in Pennsylvania, including the ones right here in the city of Philadelphia.

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 contributes 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, including almost 900 in Philadelphia alone, 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 nursing 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 the state--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. 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, however, we need to 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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Helen Gym". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Helen" and last name "Gym" clearly distinguishable.

Helen Gym

Philadelphia City Councilmember At-Large