

LONG TERM CARE COMMUNITY COALITION

Tri-County LTC Ombudsman Program

www.nursinghome411.org

Statement of Judy A. Farrell, MPA,

Director, Tri-County LTC Ombudsman Program

August 3, 2020

Joint Senate and Assembly Public Hearing/Residential Health Care Facilities and Covid-19

Thank you for inviting me to submit a statement on the impact of Covid-19 on residential health care facilities. My perspective is based on the hundreds of heartbreaking conversations I have had with families and residents during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The facilities are home to thousands of New York's most vulnerable residents. Many of these residents knew each other, shared meals together, participated in recreational activities and enjoyed visits with families and friends. No one was prepared for the spread of this horrific virus, the massive death toll, and the inability to spend precious last minutes of life comforted by loved ones.

From the beginning, we knew that Covid-19 would take a devastating toll on the elderly, particularly in long term care facilities. Now we know over 6,000 residents died in a few short months.

As the new long term care ombudsman for Region 4 (Westchester,

Rockland and Putnam counties), I soon became aware that the only office having direct contact with residents and families during the peak of Covid-19 was the long term care ombudsman. I received calls from desperate families eager to get information on infections in their loved one's facility; I received calls from family members seeking to arrange end-of-life compassionate care visits; I received calls asking for assistance with getting bodies to be released to funeral homes.

While I was able to advocate for residents and connect some with their families via technology or help families safely discharge loved ones, residents, families and facilities were overwhelmed by the pandemic and living in fear.

Today, months later, families are still not able to visit loved ones due to the continuing number of staff testing positive for Covid-19. It is vital for all of us concerned with the lives of people living in long term care facilities to find a way to not only protect our elderly and people with disabilities from future outbreaks, but to **solve the devastating problem of isolation and lack of human connection that may also impact the mental health, cognitive capacity and lives of so many residents and their families.**

Based on all of the fears and concerns I have heard expressed to me since Covid-19 swept through facilities, and with over 20 years of experience in health care and public health, I offer the following recommendations for your consideration:

1. Ensure residents of long term care facilities are represented during New York's emergency preparedness planning and that there is public access to emergency preparedness plans.
2. Notify families and guardians of long term care residents immediately of imminent threats to their health and safety.
3. Share with residents and families information about all of the assistance available to them through times of public health crises, including the services of the Office of the State Long Term Care Ombudsman; complaint report hotlines; and local Department of Health contact information.

4. Continue to invest in and support technology that allows residents, families, friends and representatives to stay connected virtually.
5. Bring all stakeholders to the table planning the future of long term care in New York, including representatives of residents.

One final thought: it has been said that we as a society will be measured by how we treat the most vulnerable. While we cannot have known and still do not know fully the horrific Covid-19 virus, we must all work to ensure that we are prepared for the next outbreak and that we do everything we can to protect New York's elderly population and people with disabilities.

Thank you for convening these important hearings.

Judy A. Farrell, MPA
Director, Tri-County LTC Ombudsman Program
Office of the State Long Term Care Ombudsman
Long Term Care Community Coalition (LTCCC)
10 North Street
Cold Spring, NY 10516
(914) 500-3406
judy@ltccc.org
