

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 5, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Seema Verma
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Secretary Azar and Administrator Verma:

We are greatly concerned about the overwhelming impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on residents and staff of long-term care facilities. In addition to more resources for testing, treatment, and PPE, we write to ask Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to immediately increase the frequency and intensity of inspections conducted for nursing homes and long-term care facilities, especially for those facilities already on provisional licenses or facilities handling outbreaks.

As of May 3, in Pennsylvania, there were 9,122 nursing and personal care homes resident cases of COVID-19, and 1,194 cases among employees, for a total of 10,316 at 492 distinct facilities in 44 counties. Out of Pennsylvania's total deaths, 1,635 have occurred in residents from nursing or personal care facilities.¹ According to media outlets, more than 16,000 nursing home and long-term care residents and staff have died in the U.S., roughly a quarter of the nation's overall deaths.²

In normal times, visiting family members are the first line of defense against unsafe and unsanitary conditions. Now, if these conditions are allowed to develop for even a moment, and they are undetected because of the absence of visitors, the lives of our seniors will be at risk. With the new risks posed by COVID-19, and the absence of visiting family members, the current CMS inspection cycle of 9 -15 months is inadequate. COVID-19 spreads quickly through vulnerable communities such as long-term care residents and is unforgiving of mistakes or delayed responses. In Western Pennsylvania, Brighton Rehabilitation and Wellness Center is a concrete example of the risk to our seniors with over 400 presumed positive residents and over 60 COVID-19 related deaths.

¹ <https://local21news.com/news/local/pa-dept-of-health-confirms-962-new-covid-19-cases-statewide-total-49267>

² <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2020/05/01/coronavirus-nursing-homes-more-states-pressured-name-facilities/3062537001/>

We urge CMS to increase the frequency of surveys in order to safeguard our nursing homes and aging population. We also encourage CMS to communicate directly with affected families about its survey plans to provide better peace of mind about the safety of their loved ones.

We look forward to receiving your response to this urgent request. If you have any questions, please contact Rachel Hugman of Congressman Lamb's staff at (202) 225-2301.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Conor Lamb in blue ink.

Conor Lamb
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Mike Doyle in blue ink.

Mike Doyle
Member of Congress