



An affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

April 12, 2022

The Honorable Gary Day
Chair
House Aging & Older Adult Services Committee
PO Box 202187
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Steve Samuelson
Democratic Chair
House Aging & Older Adult Services Committee
PO Box 202135
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Chair Day & Chair Samuelson:

Thank you for your attention to long-term care and its residents of Pennsylvania during the COVID-19 outbreak. The continued attention that the House Aging & Older Services Committee has provided to Pennsylvania Coalition of Affiliated Healthcare & Living Communities (PACAH) members, and their residents, has been paramount during this difficult time.

PACAH members care for one of the most vulnerable populations - a population extremely vulnerable to COVID-19. Before and during the COVID-19 outbreak, PACAH members have been the safety net for many counties in Pennsylvania, delivering a level of access to care that other facilities may not provide. This is even more true in the current environment. As many non-PACAH facilities struggle to provide care through regular ownership changes and limited services, PACAH's county facility members have risen to the occasion, providing the same level of support and care that Pennsylvania residents have come to expect. This is especially true for our Medicaid residents who lack the resources for care that others may have.

We are grateful for the opportunity to share our experiences regarding the workforce challenges facing long-term care facilities. As we faced the COVID-19 pandemic, facilities consistently struggled with staffing issues for a number of reasons. Despite the challenges, many facilities were still able to stay above the minimum staff to resident ratio required by law. However, as many industries have increased compensation rates, many long-term care facilities have seen staff leave the health care field for more lucrative and more-often less stressful employment. Below, we have provided experiences and examples that we believe show the struggles facilities currently face with the health care work force.

I. Agency Staffing

In the past, when facilities have faced staffing shortages, they have relied upon outside third-party staff agencies to support them until they were able to hire new staff. Unfortunately, while this structure worked in the past, the premise of this agreement is based on the underlying concept that the facility would be able to hire someone on a more permanent basis. This premise no longer exists.

Many of PACAH's members have had nursing positions and administration positions that have been open for months. One facility in Lehigh County holds over 10 interviews a day, consistently has over 100 positions open for employment, and has a turnover rate of about 10 days. In turn, agencies have tripled their costs to supply facilities with staff while at the same time offering facility staff better pay and work environments if they worked for the agency rather than PACAH members, resulting in an even larger reduction in facility staff. If something is not done to limit these actions, residents will begin to receive a reduction in their quality of care only due to greed.

II. Competitor Funding

In addition to PACAH members competing with staffing agencies, PACAH members also compete with other health care providers. Many facilities are competing with hospitals and other acute care providers that can offer far more to staff than PACAH members can.

The facility in Lehigh County, which was mentioned above, has a hospital system next to it. This hospital system just announced a \$28,000 signing bonus for new registered nurses. PACAH Members can not compete with \$28,000 signing bonuses. Long-term care facilities need to be provided increase MA rates so they can offer competitive compensation to staff while maintaining the proper standard of care for its residents.

III. Future of Nursing Homes

I testified in front of this committee 18 months ago and specifically mentioned that workforce shortages were going to be a future problem for long-term care facilities. While I based my testimony at the time on fear of COVID-19, I did not anticipate that third-party vendors and competitors would capitalize on workforce shortages through poaching and increased wages.

While we continue to fight for our residents and staff, PACAH thanks the Committee for its attention to long-term care during this time. We hope that the Committee will consider our comments as they work to support our long-term care facilities, their staff and their residents. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you may have on this topic or on long-term care in general.

Sincerely,

Chase Cannon
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Coalition of Affiliated Health Care & Living Communities
