

Nursing Home and Assisted Living Oversight Working Group
Socialization, Visitation and Caregiver Engagement Subcommittee

Meeting Summary

Monday, December 21, 2020 10:00 AM via Zoom

The meeting was called to order by Senator Cathy Osten, Subcommittee Co-Chair

1. Opening Remarks

- Subcommittee Co-Chairs Osten and Mairead Painter welcomed subcommittee members and thanked them for their due diligence. Ms. Painter introduced Kristopher Thompson from Oak Hill, who was invited to brief the subcommittee on technology solutions to assist with visitation.

2. Presentation by Kristopher Thompson, Oak Hill Centers Coordinator

- Mr. Thompson remarked that he has been working to match technology to people and to help them gain more independence and stay socially connected during the pandemic. He shared three presentations: (see [subcommittee website](#) for slides and [CT-N](#) for presentation)
 - Aging Matters 2020
 - Technology to Combat Social Isolation
 - Securing a Smart Speaker
- Senator Osten and Mr. Thompson discussed privacy issues. Mr. Thompson offered that there are privacy settings that can be used on devices.
- Representative Hughes remarked that people with cognitive difficulties tend to gravitate toward low tech solutions, like a standard telephone, so they can focus on what they are hearing rather than on the device. She stressed the need to find a bridge of low tech solutions to meet the needs of people who are unable to adapt to a new technology. Mr. Thompson agreed with Rep. Hughes regarding "meeting people where they are" with technology and what they are comfortable using. He added that there is a role for smart technology for people with dementia, such as reminders and prompts and the use of sensors on doors and windows. Rep. Hughes and Mr. Thompson further discussed the learning curve associated with the use of smart devices and technology.
- Senator Osten commented that over the next decade people will be accustomed to using smart technology and that residents of nursing homes and assisted living

- facilities will have a greater comfort level with the technology. She spoke of how the use of smart technology has been freeing for people in the disability community and has opened up opportunities for inclusion. Sen. Osten also commented that not all nursing home residents are elderly, and the subcommittee recommendations will need to address solutions across the age spectrum.
- Ms. Painter remarked that developing policies on the use of technology across the spectrum could make CT a best practice state beyond the pandemic. She spoke of the ways in which technology could connect seniors newly arrived at a long term care facility to their previous life, such as activities at their senior center or music. In addition, Ms. Painter spoke of the equipment and technology that Oak Hill has in Hartford that people can test out, and she encouraged interested parties or long term care facilities who had questions or concerns to reach out to Oak Hill.
 - Matthew Barrett asked if a device like Alexa could record conversations being held by other people in the vicinity, such as the conversations of a roommate and their family or a CNA conferring with a colleague outside of the room. Mr. Thompson replied that he believed there is a setting to stop recordings from being stored. He stated that like the use of notification of cameras being in use, perhaps some signage would be worth considering. Mr. Thompson clarified that Alexa needs to be specifically activated in order to record conversations. He further stated that an Alexa device "knows" it is picking up a random conversation and will stop recording.
 - Mr. Barrett then asked if Mr. Thompson was aware of any disputes among family members over a family member activating the recording of conversations from a distance. Mr. Thompson replied that he was not aware of any such situations.
 - Mag Morelli remarked that LeadingAge facilities are trying to be conscious of and sensitive to privacy issues, including the use of cellphones and tablets in rooms shared by residents. Ms. Morelli, Mr. Thompson and Ms. Painter discussed the "drop in" feature. Mr. Thompson stated that he would look deeper into the feature. Ms. Morelli stated that as new technologies become available it will be important to be mindful of privacy issues.
 - Annette Cochefski and Mr. Thompson discussed the effect of spotty Wi Fi connections and the need to have the best high speed internet possible. There was also discussion regarding hot spots. Mr. Thompson shared that hot spots can be more expensive than standard internet service.
 - Mr. Thompson suggested a site, Independent Living Aids, that has a number of lower tech options to consider.
 - Representative McCarty stated that it was important to identify ways to overcome privacy issues and to get residents connected, and then build on different uses of

technology. She appreciated Mr. Thompson alerting the members to the Independent Living Aids site and stated that she would like to receive additional information regarding the site.

3. Discussion of Policy Recommendations

- Senator Osten discussed process with Nick Bombace, LCO Attorney. Mr. Bombace agreed with Senator Osten that a one pager on each recommendation would be appropriate, rather than the subcommittee recommending full legislative language.
- Senator Osten asked members who had policy recommendations to keep them to one paragraph and to submit them to Susan Keane, Subcommittee Administrator, by Thursday so they could be distributed to subcommittee members for discussion during the December 28 meeting. Further, she asked members to limit recommendations to socialization, visitation and caregiver engagement issues. Senator Osten stated that the subcommittee should not be prescriptive regarding the jurisdiction of other subcommittees. She cited as an example stating that implementation of a recommendation would require additional staff, but not prescribe a specific number.
- Liz Stern announced that Rhode Island begins its essential caregiver (EC) program today (December 21). She shared that Nebraska started its essential caregiver program a few weeks ago. Ms. Stern stated her support for that policy and that she knew other subcommittee members support the policy as well. Further, she stated that she viewed the program as an economic opportunity, as well as a moral imperative. Ms. Stern added that there are a significant number of documents that can help guide the development of the EC program and that the state does not have to "reinvent the wheel". She remarked that Connecticut can learn from the programs implemented in other states. Further, she stated that she believes that facility owners have "everything to gain" by instituting an essential caregiver program and that the program could be used as an indicator of how well facilities are working.
 - Ms. Painter asked Ms. Stern to share the link to the Rhode Island program. Ms. Stern replied that she will share the link, although she believes there are EC programs in other states that are better than the Rhode Island program. Ms. Painter asked Ms. Stern to provide links to the other state programs in the order of how Ms. Stern would rank them. She remarked that some states have found ways to work with the long term care industry in developing their programs. Ms. Stern replied that she is now working with facility owners.

- Ms. Morelli sought clarification that the EC program recommendations should fit into the CMS compassionate care guidelines. Ms. Painter responded that it should be framed within the guidelines.
- Representative McCarty stated her support for Ms. Stern's recommendations regard the EC program. She observed that in reviewing subcommittee members' policy recommendations, most agree that the EC program deserves the state's undivided attention. Further, she remarked on the importance of working with the long term care industry on an EC program. Rep. McCarty thanked Ms. Stern for highlighting the EC program. Lastly, Rep. McCarty informed the members that she had raised the connectivity issue with the Infrastructure and Capital Improvements Funding Subcommittee. She stated that connectivity is going to be an important issue not only for socialization, but as telehealth is utilized more in long term care facilities.

Seeing no further business, Ms. Painter adjourned the meeting.