

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

Meeting Summary

Monday, November 23, 2020 10:00 AM via Zoom

The meeting was convened by Senator Cathy Osten, Subcommittee Co-Chair

1. Opening Remarks

- Senator Osten stated that the purpose of the meeting was to talk with two residents of nursing homes to hear about their experiences during the pandemic. She offered that it is important for decision makers to work with residents in developing policy, rather than making policy for them without their input.
- Mairead Painter, Long Term Care Ombudsman and Subcommittee Co-Chair, informed members that a letter went out to residents and family members across the state on Friday regarding safe ways to conduct visits over the Thanksgiving holiday.

2. Remarks from Nursing Home Residents

- Jeannette Sullivan-Martinez, President of the Executive Board of the Resident Council Presidents, shared her perspectives regarding the impact of COVID-19 and the needs of residents:
  - Residents are more restricted to their rooms. Outdoor visitations at the facility where she resides have been limited to 30 minutes. She shared how particularly frustrating that policy has been to her, as she has been unable to physically hold and interact with her six month old granddaughter.
  - Stress is high, as are the incidents of depression.
  - Some residents are experiencing weight loss, while others are experiencing weight gain due to the lack of socialization.
  - Residents were able to do some hallway recreational activities until a recent COVID-19 outbreak among staff.
  - Residents miss human contact and the ability to give and receive a hug.
  - The Resident Council has been unable to meet. She and the VP of the Council continue to communicate regarding issues that need to be addressed.
  - While there was live entertainment held outside during the warm weather months, there was no picnic this year, nor will there be a Christmas gathering. She appreciates the efforts of the staff to be creative in offering

events for residents, such as a potential hot cocoa and cookie afternoon, but these activities will be held in residents' rooms.

- Residents are given the opportunity to communicate with the families using an iPad.
  - Food has not been allowed to be brought in by family members for nine months.
- Ms. Painter asked Ms. Sullivan-Martinez if she had any recommendations regarding actions that could be taken to enhance socialization. Ms. Sullivan-Martinez offered that when a facility is COVID-free, small groups of residents should be allowed to socialize on a rotating basis, with proper precautions.
    - Rep. Hughes offered that she knows of facilities that are congregating in small dining rooms and day rooms for activities while following the safety guidelines.
  - Ms. Painter shared that new guidance has been issued by the Department of Public Health regarding food being brought into facilities by family members. Families are being encouraged to bring holiday meals as a way to stay connected with their loved ones. She stated that epidemiology considers it okay to do so.
  - Martha Leland, also a member of the Executive Board of the Resident Council Presidents, offered her perspectives:
    - Ms. Leland shared her experience as a COVID-19 patient. She spoke highly of the quick response of the nursing home staff when she began to show symptoms.
    - She expressed the sadness she felt when her roommate passed away alone, as her roommate had not wanted Ms. Leland to watch her die.
    - Like Ms. Sullivan-Martinez, Ms. Leland spoke of the challenges associated with being isolated from family, friends and fellow residents and of residents losing their support systems.
    - Staff reductions have had a negative impact on residents, as it is difficult to lose staff that residents have come to rely on.
    - Residents are being adversely affected by the limited recreational activities being offered.
      - She shared that she has been working on a host of activities for Thanksgiving and Christmas.
  - Elizabeth Stern stated that her research has revealed that restrictions and guidelines have been developed without resident input. She asked if that was the experience of Ms. Sullivan-Martinez and Ms. Leland. Ms. Leland responded that residents in the facility where she resides have had no influence on the decisions made. Ms. Sullivan-Martinez stated that the same was true in her residence.

- Ms. Painter remarked that individuals who chose to receive long term care services and supports in nursing homes or other long term care facilities are very able to participate in the decision-making process.
- Ms. Stern remarked that she appreciated the comments about cohorting and the issue of weight loss.
- Senator Osten and Ms. Painter thanked their guests for the comments and insights. Sen. Osten reminded members that the subcommittee would be hearing from family members during the November 30 meeting.
- Ms. Painter reiterated the importance of facilities supporting their residents through the holidays and helping them connect with family members.
- Mag Morelli thanked Ms. Sullivan-Martinez and Ms. Leland for sharing their appreciation of staff and the work they are doing. She also spoke of the efforts of facilities to adjust as guidance changes. Ms. Morelli thanked Ms. Painter for the letter that she sent and the importance of on-going communication.
- Matt Barrett thanked Ms. Leland for her comment about staffing reductions. He shared how the occupancy rate has dropped since COVID-19 and the impact that has had on staffing. He also spoke about the challenges with cohorting, but that it is an issue that needs continued exploration. He also commended Ms. Painter on her letter.
- Senator Osten offered the following topics for future meetings:
  - November 30 – Perspectives from family members.
  - December 7 – Discussion of policy areas to be explored

Seeing no further discussion, Senator Osten adjourned the meeting.