



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

Special Time For Senior Citizens

JAMES L. SEWARD September 24, 2009

| ISSUE: **AGING**



New York recently celebrated the state's first ever Assisted Living Week. I was fortunate to mark this special occasion by meeting with residents and caregivers at several adult care/assisted living facilities within the 51st district. These unique facilities are filled with wonderful individuals extremely deserving of this distinctive honor.

First, some background on assisted living: Currently there are 500 assisted living residences and adult care facilities licensed to operate across New York. The facilities are for senior

citizens who are still largely independent and do not require around the clock nursing care. Staff members assist seniors who are at a point in their lives where it is too difficult or unsafe to live alone. Services include help with everyday activities; things like bathing, grooming, housekeeping, help taking medication and scheduling doctor appointments.

There are a number of positive reasons why assisted living facilities are attracting more and more residents. Financially, the residences make a great deal of sense. Quality health care is becoming increasingly expensive at a time when many senior citizens find themselves on fixed incomes and are struggling to make ends meet. Assisted living facilities can provide services at roughly a third of the cost of nursing homes.

Along with the economic factor, assisted living allows residents to maintain a level of freedom and responsibility they are comfortable with. This substantial quality of life issue cannot be overlooked. Seniors receive care in a home-like atmosphere dedicated to preserving the dignity and independence of residents. The positive mind set provided by these services can mean a great deal when it comes to an individual's physical health.

Many assisted living residences are also licensed to provide "aging in place" programs. These programs allow seniors to remain in their current assisted living residences even as they begin to require more specialized care. Programs like this prevent the need to transfer into more costly institutionalized or nursing home care.

Adult care facilities are also serving an ever growing population. According to the Empire State Association of Assisted Living, New York's population of residents age 65 and older is expected to grow by nearly a half million by 2015. These senior citizens will require varying levels of care and assisted living residences are the wave of future, providing the best of all worlds.

With this growing need in mind, the state budget this year included a significant increase in the number of assisted living program beds. Over the next several years 6,000 new beds will be phased in across the state to help accommodate the emergent senior citizen population. This is a critical step to ensure that there are enough beds to meet existing and future demands. It is no secret that this was an extremely difficult budget year. While there are many items in the state budget that I objected to, this is a very worthy item that will provide an overall cost savings.

The state budget also included increased funding for the Quality Incentive Payment program (QUIP) which is used to bridge the gap between low Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments and the actual cost of providing care. QUIP program funds are meant to improve the quality of residents' life and care and to enhance services provided in the facility. QUIP program funds can be used for items like clothing, computers, furnishings and staff training.

The funding level for the Enhancing Abilities and Life Experience program (ENABLE) received a boost as well. The program provides funding for a variety of needs geared toward improving the quality of life for residents. Nutrition programs, computer training, air conditioning, generators, health and wellness awareness and medication management are among the items the grants may cover.

The theme for this inaugural Assisted Living Week was "Traditions of the Heart," a fitting sentiment for such a special celebration. I encourage you to visit one of the many local facilities and learn more about this blossoming service.