



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

Senator Helming Calls on State to Provide Rapid Coronavirus Tests to Nursing Homes

PAMELA HELMING September 28, 2020

After calling on the state to expand access to free COVID-19 testing in the Finger Lakes region, Senator Helming is now offering the state another solution to the problems created by its new testing mandate for nursing home visitors.

Helming is asking the New York State Department of Health to supply nursing homes with rapid tests that provide a COVID-19 test result within minutes. Scheduled visitors can then be tested on the same day of arrival.

“If the state is going to mandate testing, then it must ensure that the necessary resources are in place for people to get tested,” said Senator Helming. “This rapid test would protect our nursing home residents and allow family members to safely visit their loved ones in accordance with state guidelines.”

The Food and Drug Administration has authorized a 15-minute test from Abbott Laboratories that doesn’t require specialized equipment to get results. Abbott has said it will make 50 million tests a month starting in October and plans to sell them for \$5 each.

“Access to these tests would also increase testing capacity and turnaround time, which is a concern in our region and more rural areas of the state,” said Helming.

Under its latest nursing home visitation guidelines, the New York State Department of Health is requiring visitors to present a verified negative COVID-19 test result within the last seven days.

Helming said this new testing requirement is problematic on many fronts, considering:

- Access to testing sites for asymptomatic people is limited;
- If an asymptomatic person can get tested, the fees can be significant;
- Individuals must get and pay for the test each time they want to visit beyond the initial seven-day window;
- Obtaining a test result within a seven-day window is not guaranteed.

Helming pointed out that the state's guidelines already provide for safety measures, including face masks and social distancing.

“This testing requirement is a roadblock that makes it even harder, if not impossible, for residents and their families to be together,” said Helming. “The Department of Health should be working with nursing homes to ensure safe and practical visitation, not putting obstacles in the way of that goal. If the state insists on mandatory testing, then it must provide our nursing homes with the resources they need to follow the guidance and bring residents and families together, where they belong.”

A copy of Senator Helming's letter follows.

Senator Helming represents the 54th Senate District, which consists of Seneca and Wayne Counties, parts of Cayuga and Ontario Counties, and the towns of Lansing and Webster. For more information, please visit Senator Helming's website, or follow @SenatorHelming on

Facebook or Twitter.