

THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK



SENATOR
PAMELA A. HELMING
54TH DISTRICT

RANKING MINORITY MEMBER
COMMERCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND SMALL BUSINESS
LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION
ON RURAL RESOURCES

COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE
HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
RACING, GAMING AND WAGERING

September 23, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12248

Dr. Howard A. Zucker, Commissioner
New York State Department of Health
Corning Tower, Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12237

Dear Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Zucker:

Since the release of the latest nursing home visitation guidance, I have taken calls from a significant number of my constituents concerned with the new requirement that visitors be tested for COVID-19. I share their concerns.

If the state is mandating this testing requirement, then the state must also expand access to free COVID-19 testing in the Finger Lakes region.

Many people in my district, particularly those in more rural areas, do not have convenient access to free COVID-19 testing. And many asymptomatic individuals who *are* able to get the test are paying a significant fee for it, in some cases, nearly \$200 or more.

One woman recently called my office and said she decided to pay \$70 for a taxi ride to a free testing site an hour away, because it was cheaper than paying the \$175 she was quoted for a test near her.

Then, consider the fact that these individuals have to get and pay for the test multiple times if they want to see their family member again after the seven days.

There are so many potential ramifications to this requirement. Many of my constituents are concerned about the ability to obtain a timely test result within the seven-day window. And, if someone in the nursing home tests positive, they won't be allowed the visit anyway, and they've already paid for the test.



I am concerned that with this new testing requirement, the state is putting an additional burden on family members, who are now dealing with another difficult, and costly, barrier to seeing their loved ones. I also remain deeply concerned about the physical and mental health of our nursing home residents isolated from their families.

I'm also aware that the state is permitting visits to inmates at state correctional facilities, without the requirement that visitors present a negative COVID-19 test. If the state can allow inmates to have visitors without a test, and on top of that, be able to exchange a quick hug, surely the state can find a way to do the same for our nursing home residents.

I believe that by working with the experts who staff our nursing homes, we can find a balance between protecting the most vulnerable from the virus and providing them with the support and connection they so desperately need from their families. I am willing to assist in any way to make safe, in-person family visits possible in our nursing homes.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Pamela A. Helming
Senator, 54th District
Member, Senate Health Committee