

Senator Pam Helming

Representing the 54th New York Senate District



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Reunite Nursing Home Residents and Families

Nothing is more important than family. For months, residents of New York nursing homes have been isolated from their loved ones. It is time to reunite them.

As our state continues to safely reopen, and new COVID-19 cases remain low, nursing homes and long-term care facilities should be empowered to implement plans for safely resuming in-person family visits.

After listening to countless families and their loved ones in my district, I am deeply concerned that these months of isolation have taken a serious toll on the mental and physical well-being of our older citizens.

These concerns were brought to life in a Sept. 3 article published in AARP magazine, "Is Extended Isolation Killing Older Adults in Long-Term Care?"

The journalist reports that experts, resident advocates and family members say the lockdown is "fueling a mental health crisis" in long-term care, and that "feelings of loneliness, abandonment, despair and fear among residents—and their toll on physical and neurological health—are only pushing the pandemic's death toll higher."

The article goes on to state that evidence shows that social isolation and loneliness "significantly increase a person's risk of mortality from all causes." Studies have shown that isolation and loneliness are associated with a 50 percent increased risk of developing dementia, a 32 percent increased risk of stroke, and a fourfold increased risk of death among heart failure patients.

I believe 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.

Prior to my career in public service, I worked in a nursing home and group homes supporting our seniors and developmentally disabled citizens. I also served as a member of the Quail Summit Senior Living Center board of directors. I have the utmost respect for the caring, compassionate staff of our local nursing homes and long-term care facilities. They are the experts and understand the importance and positive mental health impacts of visitation.

I am asking the Governor and the state Health Commissioner to work with these facilities to further ease the restrictions that are in place, so we can keep residents and staff safe, and mitigate the negative effects of ongoing separation from close family members.

As a newly-appointed member of the Senate Health Committee, I will continue to fight for the interests and safety of our local nursing home residents and their loved ones.

Nothing is more important than family. Let's finally reunite our nursing home residents with the people they love and need most.

Pam Helming represents the 54th District in the New York State Senate.