**SUBJECT: Please Re-consider Family Visitation Guidance for ACF and Nursing Home Residents**

As the family member/loved one of a nursing home/adult care facility (ACF) resident, I am deeply concerned about the impact of strict limits on visitation. Many residents are going on 6 months without visitation from their loved ones and as a result these seniors are showing signs of depression, anxiety, and related physical decline as a result of this social isolation. The dedicated staff at my loved one’s facility are doing their very best to find ways to otherwise connect residents to their families. However, under the current visitation guidance there is little that can be done to provide residents the in-person, interactions they deserve.

On July 10th, the Department of Health (DOH) issued guidance to ACFs and nursing homes regarding conditions under which limited visitation may take place. The guidance is thorough and rightfully outlines some important restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19. However, some of these requirements are so burdensome that most nursing homes and ACFs are still not able to legally open for family visitation. A notable obstacle for providers in reopening and maintaining family visitation is the requirement for there to be “no new confirmed staff or resident cases in the last twenty-eight days”. The is an over-burdensome requirement given that the standard quarantine time for any confirmed case of COVID-19 is fourteen days. Since the updated guidance was released in early July, many facilities have opened family visitation only to quickly shut back down due to one staff positive. When this happens, no visitors are welcome in the facility for twice the length of a COVID-19 quarantine.

As time goes on, some families and residents are becoming frustrated and going out on visits against existing guidance. When a family member takes a resident out, they have the potential to interact with many people and increase their risk of exposure. They may or may not wear masks and keep at a distance from others. Those residents then return to the ACF/nursing home, potentially putting other residents and staff at risk. As a family member that is trying to follow best practices and not take my loved one out into the community, this is very frustrating to see. Allowing visitation onsite can ensure a safer environment in which all public health guidelines are being adhered to; thereby reducing the risk to all that live and work in the ACF or nursing home.

While the July 10th guidance was a necessary first step to re-allowing visitation in nursing home and ACF settings, it is now time for a more reasonable approach to family visitation that would truly allow severely isolated seniors to connect with their loved ones. Well thought-out and reasonable plans are critical to the overall wellbeing of residents and staff of ACFs and nursing homes across the state. Alternatively, failing to open more visitation is likely to result in some residents taking greater risks and going into the community without necessarily having all of the aforementioned safeguards in place.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue,

NAME

City, State