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COMMITTEE ON  
WAYS AND MEANS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY  
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

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DIABETES CAUCUS, CO-CHAIR

June 8, 2020

The Honorable Lloyd Doggett  
Chairman, Health Subcommittee  
1102 Longworth House Office Building

Dear Chairman Doggett,

Since the end of February, our nation's seniors have been the target of a horrific new Coronavirus. COVID-19 has swept through our nursing homes and assisted living facilities leaving a trail of pain and suffering behind. In fact, nearly half of all deaths resulting from COVID-19 are patients and workers at nursing homes. Nursing homes in New York were especially hard hit. As the Committee charged with overseeing Medicare and our nation's nursing homes, it is critical we investigate how this was allowed to happen, with particular focus on best practices moving forward.

This Committee has a strong history of bipartisan cooperation and leadership when it comes to protecting our seniors. That commitment to patients in nursing homes and assisted living facilities has most recently been demonstrated in our November hearing on Caring for Aging Americans, and a joint letter between Chairman Neal and Ranking Member Brady, along with Senate Finance leadership, looking into potential misuse of antipsychotic medications<sup>1</sup>. Our leadership is required once again to address the deadly impact of COVID-19 on older Americans.

From early on in this crisis, we knew that older patients were more susceptible to this virus. Across the country, over 2.1 million patients live in nursing homes or other residential care communities<sup>2</sup>. As of June 1<sup>st</sup>, this population accounts for 42% of COVID-19 deaths<sup>3</sup>. As the public health emergency continues, these patient populations will continue to be at risk.

In the state of New York, over 5,900<sup>4</sup> nursing home residents and adult day care died from COVID-19. New York is an outlier in this statistic, and one of only a few states that required nursing homes to take COVID positive patients from hospitals. It appears that once in the facility, the virus spread to patients and staff alike furthering the extent of devastation. The Subcommittee should examine what went wrong in New York so that other might learn from these mistakes and prevent avoidable deaths as this COVID-19 crisis continues.

As public health officials and epidemiologists warn of a potential second wave, we must ensure that our states and nursing homes are better prepared to deal with this threat and keep our seniors safe. I was glad to see the Administration take action in allocating \$4.9 billion to nursing facilities from the Provider

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.finance.senate.gov/chairmans-news/congressional-policy-leaders-look-for-review-of-antipsychotic-prescription-use-in-nursing-homes>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr\\_03/sr03\\_43-508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_03/sr03_43-508.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://freopp.org/the-covid-19-nursing-home-crisis-by-the-numbers-3a47433c3f70>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.modernhealthcare.com/providers/rebuilding-nursing-homes-after-covid-19>

Relief Fund Congress created in the CARES Act. This additional funding should help facilities improve their testing capacity, acquire additional personal protective equipment (PPE), and address critical labor shortages. A hearing would provide the Subcommittee the opportunity to examine how those funds are being utilized on the ground and what else Congress could do to protect these patients.

The devastating toll COVID-19 has already taken on nursing home residents and staff cannot be ignored, and the threat is not over. I strongly encourage you to convene a hearing to both examine what went wrong, especially in areas like New York, but also provide a pathway forward. By bringing in industry and public health experts, we can, as a Subcommittee, help save lives by highlighting the best practices that need to be implemented by nursing homes across the country. I stand ready to work with you to accomplish this. Our seniors cannot wait.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tom Reed', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tom Reed  
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Richard Neal, Chairman, Ways and Means Committee