



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
Rachel May

Senator Rachel May Co-chairs Hearing on Pandemic Impact on Upstate Nursing Homes, Families

RACHEL MAY August 10, 2020

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| COMMITTEE: **AGING**



Syracuse, NY - Senator Rachel May (D-Onondaga, Madison, Oneida), chair of the Senate Committee on Aging, was one of three Senators -- along with Senator Gustavo Rivera, chair of the Senate Committee on Health, and Senator James Skoufis, chair of the Senate Committee on Investigations and Government Operations -- and their Assembly counterparts to lead the Legislature's joint hearings on nursing homes and COVID-19. The conversations were separated into two hearings, one focused on Downstate nursing homes (August 3rd) and one focused on Upstate nursing homes (August 10th).

The hearings focused on the impact of the pandemic on nursing homes, residents and families, and how to better prepare for future crises. Witnesses included family members, skilled-nursing and adult home administrators, advocates, and others from across New York State.

“Our nursing homes and adult care facilities have been the hotbed of this pandemic,” **said Senator Rachel May**. “I am so grateful to all those who testified at these hearings, especially those family members who shared such heart-wrenching stories about the pandemic’s effect on their loved ones. My hope is that the testimony we have heard, and the written testimony that many others have submitted for consideration, will help us develop sensible, achievable legislative measures to assure that our most vulnerable seniors never face this level of risk again.”

Syracuse area witnesses at the August 10 hearing included Kim Townsend, president and CEO of Loretto; family member Mary Jo Botindari, who lost her father while he was in nursing care during the pandemic; Donna Morgans, a family member and president of the family council at Van Duyn Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing; Ruth Heller, executive vice president, 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East; Tania Anders, CEO of ARISE Independent Living Center; and Nina Kohn, an elder law scholar, professor at Syracuse University College of Law, and former legal aid attorney representing nursing home residents and frail elders.

Several themes emerged at today’s hearing that echoed concerns raised at the August 3 hearing, including the urgent need for loved ones to safely resume visitation; the chronic shortage of both skilled-nursing and home care staff, especially in rural parts of the state; shortages in personal protective equipment and test kits, especially early on in the pandemic; and lack of awareness of mandated ombudsman services.

“While the Committee on Aging does not have direct oversight of nursing homes, we certainly play an important role in promoting the well-being of all seniors,” **said Senator May**. “My office has been very active in advocating for more attention to the quality of life of nursing home residents, the rights of their families to clear information and access, and the working conditions of staff. I have also been vocal about the need for more support for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, which can assist residents and families in addressing problems before they spiral out of control. These hearings were an invaluable platform for us to gather information from a variety of perspectives and stakeholders as we look to next

steps.”

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