



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

Senator Helming to State: If Mandating COVID-19 Test for Nursing Home Visitors, Expand Free Testing

PAMELA HELMING September 23, 2020

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In response to concerns raised by constituents about the latest Department of Health nursing home visitation guidelines, which require visitors to be tested for COVID-19, Senator Helming is urging the state to expand access to free COVID-19 testing.

Under current guidance from the New York State Department of Health, a visitor must now present a verified negative COVID-19 test result within the last seven days to be permitted to visit a family member in a state nursing home.

In a letter to the Governor and State Health Commissioner, Helming said since the state is mandating this testing requirement, they must 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,” said Senator Helming. “Many asymptomatic individuals who are able to get the test are paying a significant fee for it, in some cases, nearly \$200 or more.”

“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 in a nursing home again after the seven days,” Helming added.

Testing is free to eligible New Yorkers if ordered by a health care provider and performed at a test site run by New York State. At other testing sites, individuals may be responsible for fees associated with the test.

“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,” said Helming.

In rural areas in particular, there is a lack of testing sites that can perform tests for asymptomatic people. And individuals who exhibit no symptoms may not be able to get a COVID-19 test through their health care provider.

Helming added that New York State permits 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 they can do the same for our nursing home residents,” said Helming.

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

“If the state mandates this testing requirement, then they must expand access to free COVID-19 testing in our region,” Helming concluded.

A copy of Senator Helming’s letter follows.

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