



ADVOCATE • EDUCATE • ENGAGE • INSPIRE

June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Dear Bill and Amber,

Thank you for allowing us to be a part of the important conversations around the state to discuss the state's plan to lift restrictions in long term care. We recently became aware of a plan being developed by the Governor's Office, DOH and DSHS. We understand that, at some point, the plan will be discussed with stakeholders. However, we believe it is important to offer our recommendations in advance of the distribution of a draft in an effort to have these issues addressed at the outset. As background for our following recommendations, we affirm our continued commitment to the recommendations laid out in our May 20th letter to you. A copy of that letter is reattached for your convenience.

As the Governor's Stay Home order expires, and communities begin to resume normal activities, we remain concerned about the effects of re-opening on Long Term Care communities. As the opportunity for increasing exposure to asymptomatic COVID infected individuals grows, we fear there may be a spike in community-wide cases and hence within long term care communities as well. This, coupled with the fact long term care still has a shortage of PPE and is weeks away from completing point prevalence testing, makes for a highly volatile situation in our facilities. We re-emphasize the need to exercise extreme caution when moving towards "normalizing" activities and services within long term care. We must also ensure long term care facilities are armed with necessary PPE, testing supplies and have immediate access to back-up staffing to safeguard the health and safety of high risk elderly persons living in congregate and the staff that care for them.

This will indeed be a balancing of residents' needs for autonomy and engagement with family and friends to reduce unintended consequences of loneliness and isolation against the very real public health risks of COVID and the oftentimes dire consequence of death. Long term care providers are eager for guidance on how to best balance these competing interests – autonomy and social engagement against health and life.

Specifically, communities are seeking and we are offering suggested guidance for the following amenities and services:

- Beauty and barbershop services
- Facility exercise clubs/gyms
- Nail care
- Religious and spiritual services
- Group dining
- Group activities standards

LeadingAge Washington suggests that the decision to resume these services should follow their county's safe start plan and only consider the resumption of these activities/services if they are open and available to the county's general public. Each amenity should follow the safe start rules that have been established by the Governor. We believe opening more amenities within each long term care community may help decrease the instances of residents leaving to access these and other services in the greater community. Any written guidance should allow flexibility for providers to make these determinations based on the unique circumstances of each organization including its own COVID case activity and its readiness to meet resident needs should an outbreak occur ~ PPE, testing and staff.

If residents choose to travel outside of the long term care community, we request the state licensing authority affirm, in writing, that providers may impose certain restrictions or conditions on residents and visitors to ensure the health and safety of its greater, at risk, resident population. For example, a provider should be permitted to ask a resident to self-quarantine under certain appropriate circumstances, such as, exposure to a person who is knowingly exhibiting COVID symptoms. A provider should also be permitted to restrict resident access to community amenities, such as, pool, gym, salon and barber services in an effort to maintain social distancing even while wearing a face covering. Acknowledging these and other appropriate limitations are permissible will enable to providers to develop policies and procedures on these and similar concerns with confidence and without fear of licensing sanctions.

Finally, one of the most significant concerns we have is the resumption of visitation. While we know this is a complicated issue and there are many valid perspectives to consider, we continue to urge caution and a delayed or phased start. We've previously suggested that visitation be allowed under certain circumstances, including a county and facility self-assessment of readiness and importantly of COVID activity, restrictions on the number of visitors at any one time, screening and wearing of face coverings for all visitors, entering and exiting the facility in designated areas of ingress/egress, visitors providing their own PPE and banning visitors should they refuse to comply with the facility policies.

Guidance on visitation, and a host of other important matters, must be provided in the form of some legal construct by the legislature whenever they return. Until then, it is critically important that the Governor continue to issue a proclamation allowing a stay of certain laws and regulations and affording providers flexibility to make fair and balanced decisions that respect the rights and health of all residents and staff as best as is possible under these very difficult circumstances. Although mentioned in the May 20th letter, this cannot be a one-size fits all approach.

We look forward to continuing these critical conversations and finding solutions to keep our long term care residents safe.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Deb Murphy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Deb" being more prominent than the last name "Murphy".

Deb Murphy President/ CEO