



ADVOCATE • EDUCATE • ENGAGE • INSPIRE

June 25, 2020

Dear Senator Billig, Senator Schoesler, Representative Jenkins, and Representative Wilcox:

We write to you today regarding the long term care waivers, set to expire on July 1st. We want to thank you for your continued understanding of the importance of these waivers and again ask you to support an extension.

While we understand that many people are anxious to begin visitation in long term care facilities, it is still critical to continue the restrictions in Proclamations 20-6 and 20-16 extended through 20-52. We are at a pivotal point in fighting this virus; currently we are seeing an increase in cases as we conduct testing and as the state opens up. Knowing that up to 60% of COVID related deaths are individuals in long term care, we cannot take the risk of lifting restrictions without being confident we can protect residents. While in-person visitation is not achievable at this time, except under limited circumstances, many providers are finding innovative ways to connect their residents with loved ones and community. Many are providing a space on the ground level for window visits and others are putting on parades that residents can watch from a distance while maintaining social distancing. I can assure you that providers are equally as anxious, as residents and family, to begin visitation but the risk remains too high.

As we move forward, we anticipate the phased approach to lifting visitation restrictions in long term care will be released by DSHS very soon. The guidance is intended to balance the social needs of residents while continuing to protect the vulnerable population by slowly allowing visitation in a controlled environment. It is important to note that even once a facility gets to a place where visitation can start, we will still need a modified version of the proclamation in order for providers to implement reasonable visitor restrictions for safety. Providers will also need the ability to re-tighten restrictions if an outbreak occurs in the facility or surrounding community. Please provide the necessary legal support for providers to safely lift restrictions in long term care communities.

For the remainder of the waivers, we continue to ask for a longer extension. Preferably, until a special legislative session as many of these rules will require statutory changes for providers and staff to maintain compliance. If these waivers expire, we risk losing over 12,000 workers when their work is more critical than ever. DSHS is diligently working weekly with stakeholders to establish the best way to move forward, ensuring each waiver is gradually phased into compliance, or permanently changed, so we don't jeopardize our workforce.

LeadingAge Washington asks for your support to extend these waivers. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Deb Murphy". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Deb Murphy, President/CEO