Dear Editor:

Right now nursing home residents in many nursing homes could be at risk 16 hours a day. That’s because nursing homes are only required to have a registered nurse 8 hours a day/7 days a week. *The Put a Registered Nurse in the Nursing Home Act* would better protect nursing home residents by requiring nursing homes receiving money from Medicare and/or Medicaid to have a RN 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week.

RNs are critical to quality care for nursing home residents. They are the only nursing personnel with the education and licensure to conduct head-to-toe physical assessments, interviews and record reviews in order to draw conclusions about nursing diagnoses, appropriate nursing interventions and care planning; to continuously monitor and evaluate interventions; and, finally, to lead the health care team in providing care for each resident. This level of knowledge and skill is essential round the clock since the medical intensity and complexity of care of residents is greater than ever. The 24 hour presence of a RN who can assess and respond when a resident’s condition suddenly changes or deteriorates can make the difference between life and death.

Higher RN levels result in lower antipsychotic use, fewer pressure ulcers, less restraint use and cognitive decline, fewer urinary tract infections and catheterizations, less weight loss and less decrease in function. In addition, increased RN staffing can result in a decrease in unnecessary hospitalizations of nursing home residents, and a corresponding decrease in medical costs.

RNs save lives and save costs. The time has come to strengthen nursing home staffing laws. Tell your US Congressperson to co-sponsor H.R. 952,the *Put a Registered Nurse in the Nursing Home Act*. Our loved ones deserve it. (For more information, visit The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care’s staffing campaign webpage at <http://www.theconsumervoice.org/betterstaffing>).

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