

Write a Letter to the Editor!

GUIDE



Letters are still one of the most widely read sections of the local news, and a great way to get your voice heard by members of your community and elected leaders on key issues of the day. On February 28, 2022, President Biden announced groundbreaking reforms, including the creation of a minimum staffing standard, increased oversight of nursing homes and financial transparency. It is important that your voice is heard in support of these provisions.

Below are some **tips for successful letters to the editor** and **messaging that you can draw from** in writing a letter to the editor to spur action that provides stronger protections and higher quality care for residents of long-term care facilities.

TIPS ON WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (LTE's)

- Personalize your letter. Explain **your connection to the issue or why you care**. Share **a fact, personal story, experience, state or local specific data, or what you know to be true**. If there was a recent article in your local paper about nursing homes, you can also reference that article.
- Include a **“call to action”** - what do you want your audience (the readers/your community/policymakers) to know or do? **Name your local elected representatives and/or Members of Congress** and tell them they must take action to ensure the important reforms are implemented.
- LTE's have strict word limits. While they vary from paper to paper, generally you have a better chance of having your letter published if it is around **150 words, and no more than 200 words**.
- Include your **name, address, and phone number** when submitting your letter by email or in the mail. LTE's are about getting **local perspectives** (don't send a letter to a paper in another state or even a city that you don't reside in unless you are writing to a national paper like the *New York Times*).

Nursing Home Reform

The Biden Administration's recently announced initiatives to reform nursing homes are the most significant increase in protections for residents of long-term care in decades.

The nursing home reform measures will:

- Establish a new minimum staffing ratio to protect residents.
- Expand penalties for poor performing nursing homes.

- Beef up scrutiny, improve transparency and Americans' ability to comparison shop for the best home.
- Reduce resident room occupancy crowding and promote single occupancy rooms.
- Create a new payment system based on staffing adequacy, the resident experience, as well as how well facilities retain staff.
- Identify incidence of inappropriate diagnosis and use of antipsychotic drugs.
- Enhance emergency preparedness and infection preventionist requirements and continue to provide COVID-19 testing and vaccinations at nursing homes across the country.

We support the Administration's call on Congress to provide:

- Nearly \$500 million to fund CMS Survey and Certification, a 24% increase, to support health and safety inspections in nursing homes.
- Raising the dollar limit on per-instance financial penalties levied on poor-performing facilities, from \$21,000 to \$1,000,000.

Government and providers should be focused on helping residents by:

- Promoting and ensuring access to vaccinations and booster shots for all staff and residents.
- Making testing kits and supplies free to residents, staff, and visitors.
- Ensuring facilities are implementing the core principles of COVID-19 Infection Prevention - handwashing, masks and PPE, social distancing, etc.
- Improving wages, benefits, and working conditions to attract staff to these positions.

Key Points to Reference

- The pandemic has been devastating to residents of long-term care facilities and their loved ones. More than 200,000 residents and staff have died from COVID-19; countless residents have suffered from isolation and neglect.
- Chronic understaffing has been a serious problem in nursing homes for decades and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The problem has reached crisis proportions in thousands of facilities across the country.
- Weak federal staffing requirements combined with woefully inadequate state standards lead to dangerously low staffing levels and deadly consequences for residents.
- State standards for total nursing staff time fall short of research-backed recommended staffing standards. Only six states require a RN 24/7 at all facilities.
- Long-term care providers receive billions of dollars in public funds from Medicare and Medicaid. There is a lack of transparency and accountability for how they spend that money, or whether adequate amounts go toward the provision of care and quality of life - the things that really matter to residents.
- Too many nursing homes are channeling money into profits and salaries for owners and administrators, not investing in adequate staffing that prioritizes the health and wellbeing of residents, or in living wages, benefits, and training that will attract and retain qualified staff.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the editor,

Re: “National Guard to staff nursing homes” Jan. 31, the tragic truth is that even without a global pandemic, many residents in long-term care homes experience prolonged isolation, sometimes even neglect and abuse. Homes are chronically short-staffed and increasing facility ownership by for-profit companies are putting profits over people.

My mother was lucky to survive COVID-19 that spread like fire in her memory care home, but many did not. If anything positive can come out of this pandemic, it’s the spotlight it put on the need to improve the wellbeing of our most vulnerable family members.

The Biden Administration’s recently announced reforms for nursing homes will literally save lives. They will improve staffing, oversight, and accountability, and most importantly the quality of care our loved ones deserve and expect. It’s tragic that it took a pandemic to get action to hold providers accountable for how they spend billions of taxpayer dollars, but I applaud the Biden Administration for leading the way, and I urge Congress to step up and provide the funding needed to ensure these measures are implemented fully.

Kristin Hyde, Seattle, WA