

**LORETTA COLANTONIO REMARKS**  
***For AARP-Consumer Voice Hill Briefing on June 16, 2022***

My name is Loretta Colantonio. My heart is broken, and I am furious. My mother, Rita Colantonio, died in a Maryland nursing home last month at the age of 89. She deserved to die with dignity while receiving high-quality care from staff. Instead, my mother's nursing home experience was horrendous for her and a nightmare for my family.

Let me tell you our story.

I am a retired pharmacist. I was a caregiver for my mother in my own home for about three years until her dementia became too severe. At this time about four years ago, my sister and I made the difficult decision to move Mom into a nursing home. Either I or my sister visited Mom every day. And towards the end, we were both there around the clock. I tell you this so you know that we were not absentee family; we were a constant presence at the facility and in our mother's life long before the COVID-19 pandemic began.

We saw a level of care that was shocking in its inadequacy. It included staffing issues, signs of neglect, and a general lack of communication and information from staff and ownership. I could hardly keep up with who was in charge because new points of contact were not provided to us—even when we asked repeatedly.

During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the facility was ill-equipped and unprepared. My mother caught the virus twice. Although she recovered, the nursing home was slow at providing us with COVID-19 updates, and the staff did not wear personal protective equipment initially. In those days of the lockdown, I could only see her by looking through her bedroom window from the parking lot. Then staff told me I had to stop that. We went for days on end without being able to get Mom on the phone.

But it's important you know that this facility wasn't fully staffed even before the pandemic. And, after a change in ownership, many staff quit.

My sister and I saw first-hand the pain and suffering caused by such inadequate staffing.

In her final days, my mother often cried out, enduring long periods of pain because there was only one nurse to administer the medication she needed to bring her some measure of comfort. That nurse was caring for 30 residents. How can one nurse possibly care for THIRTY residents?

Mom died of pneumonia. It felt like the nursing home had abandoned her.

My mother's experience was horrendous. This is not the way it should be. We as a country need to do more to care for our elderly. Judging by the quality of care my mother got, it seems like we throw away the old in this country. It's a disgrace, and it's been happening since long before the pandemic. Significant reforms and improvements must be made—especially when it comes to staffing in nursing homes.

My mother – Rita Colantonio – deserved better. All American seniors deserve better. Thank you.