Dear Editor:

Over the past 20 years, more than 100 studies, articles and government documents have identified the important relationship between staffing levels and outcomes of care in nursing homes. The benefits of higher staffing levels can include: lower mortality and hospitalization rates; improved physical functioning; less antibiotic use and fewer pressure ulcers.

Despite these well-established findings, the federal government does not require nursing homes to have a minimum number of nurses and nursing assistants on duty. Instead, federal law only holds nursing homes to a vague and hard-to-measure standard of providing “sufficient staff and services to attain or maintain the highest possible level of physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being of each resident.”

Not only is there insufficient protection on the national level, wide variation in state law leaves many nursing home residents at greater risk due to understaffing. Even top-notch nurses and nurse aides can't deliver quality care if there aren't enough of them.

The time has come to strengthen nursing home staffing laws. 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).