

My name is Raymond DiFrancesco. I have been a resident of Carnegie Post Acute Care in Princeton, NJ for the last three years. I'm a founding member of NJ Nursing Home Residents United and a Leadership Board member of National Consumer Voice.

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony to the US Senate Committee on Aging session on July 30, 2025 titled "Awareness to Action: Combating Elder Abuse & Neglect."

After participating in many discussions in my facility and with residents from other facilities across the state, I came to the realization that the biggest abuse problem in nursing homes is that the owners don't think there's a problem. Elder abuse and neglect take place in nursing homes throughout NJ and the country, and it isn't just limited to underperforming one-star facilities.

Nursing homes residents may not be subjected to being beaten but we are subjected to abuse and neglect that can be fatal. Abuse and neglect aren't limited to physical abuse. I'm often reminded of a famous quote from Lady Allen Hurtwood, "Better a broken bone than a broken spirit." Nursing home residents are regularly stripped of their sense of control, self-worth, humanity and dignity.

A member of the NJ Nursing Home Residents United said something that really stuck with me: "People care so much for little children but why don't they care as much for elderly people."

For example, let's say you go to pick your child up at daycare and you find your child crying with a black eye, sitting on a chair that has a puddle of urine underneath it. What would you do? Just leave and say nothing? Would you bring your child back the next day? Similar situations like this happen every day in nursing homes. Residents are:

- Not taken to the bathroom because the nursing home is understaffed.
- Told to have their bowel movement in the day room in front of their fellow residents because they are wearing a diaper.
- Hurt by other residents, many with behavioral or mental health issues, with the incident being minimized or covered up by administration.

When people are looking at potential nursing homes, they are told that residents can maintain their independence and quality of life as much as they're physically able. This sense of independence is guaranteed in the "Residents' Rights" legislation. Residents quickly find out that this is not true. The loss of freedom can have a severe impact on residents, leading to isolation and depression. All too frequently, residents are expected to conform to:

- Meal choices and meal times
- Bathing schedules
- Roommate selection
- Limited activities and transportation

- Available doctors

Bed-bound residents often have the worst experiences and not always because of their health conditions. Isolation can devastate people. Through cutbacks in activity staff, caregivers may be the only social interaction they have. Their CNAs are often different each day and can cause them pain during bathing because they don't know the resident's physical condition and issues. If the resident has challenges feeding themselves, they may not eat because of lack of nursing staff.

There is this misconception that nursing homes provide a high level of care. Many residents would disagree with this idea. For example, a woman had been suffering from a stomach virus that had spread through the nursing home. She had been vomiting for several days and was experiencing diarrhea for 12 days before the Director of Nursing authorized the resident be sent to the hospital. The Emergency Room doctors determined that she was severely dehydrated and her organs were beginning to shut down. The good news is that the resident recovered from this episode but her health never fully recovered and she later died.

If you say anything about your treatment or the treatment of others, you are labeled as a "troublemaker." Then, often subject to retaliation such as longer call bell response times, poor care and verbal abuse. When I contacted the state over the treatment of a mentally challenged resident, I was called into the administrator's office and told that the nursing staff may not want to take care of me because I called the state.

Residents are basically told to either "shut up" or "leave," but because of the Older Americans Act and state programs we have other options. Nursing home residents sometimes feel that the administration has all the control. Not true, we have our own voice, possibly an active Resident Council, or maybe a supportive Social Worker.

The NJ Ombudsman's team has been instrumental in helping residents address neglect and abuse. For example, the Ombudsman's team:

- Addressed food quality when the food was so poor that residents couldn't even identify what was served.
- Provided advice and guidance to help resolve an issue where a resident was screaming for help all hours of the day and night. The staff wouldn't (or didn't know how to) address the resident's needs and ignored the stress and sleepless nights for the resident's roommate and other residents on the floor.
- Audited CNA timesheets to determine that weekend CNA staffing was inadequate for months and the facility was later fined and restricted from admitting new residents until the staffing issue was resolved.
- Stepped in when a facility attempted to influence the election of a Resident Council President

- Intervened with the Director of Nursing to remove obstacles that prevented a resident from getting the outside medical care the resident desperately needed.

My ask for today is that you reauthorize the Older Americans Act and support the other priorities included in Lori Smetanka's testimony to this committee, such as enforcement of federal standards in nursing facilities and supporting direct care staff and adequate staffing. National Consumer Voice provides legislators valuable insights into nursing home issues.

Please take into consideration the life of nursing home residents when evaluating legislation. Don't only listen to the nursing home lobby. Come speak to us, the nursing home residents in your district. Remember that we worked, paid taxes and still vote. Residents—not the nursing home lobby—are the constituents you were elected to represent.