



March 10, 2020

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr.
Governor of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor Hogan:

Thank you for your leadership in navigating the current COVID-19 outbreak as we all hope for best and diligently plan for the worst.

As you know, the Health Facilities Association of Maryland (HFAM) has been monitoring the emerging public health impact of the coronavirus outbreak with partners at the state level and the national level with our partners at the American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL). Together, we are actively advocating for public-private partnership and regulatory cooperation taking in to context the unique challenges of this virus.

We are requesting that you sign an order and put in place the visitation and screening recommendations announced yesterday by AHCA/NCAL for skilled nursing facilities and assisted living campuses in Maryland to protect residents, patients, and staff. The provisions of these recommendation include:

1. Allowing entry to only individuals who need entry.
2. Restricting activities and visitors with potential for exposure.
3. Actively screening individuals entering the building and restrict entry to those with respiratory symptoms or possible exposure to COVID-19.
4. Requiring all individuals entering the building to wash their hands at entry.
5. Setting up processes to allow remote communication for residents and others.

It is important to note that the AHCA/NCAL recommendations are not a complete ban on all visitors. The circumstances for the reason for entry need to be taken into consideration, particularly for immediate family members (e.g. spouse or sons/daughters), but routine social visits are strongly discouraged.

Those who are allowed entry under the recommendations include facility employees, contractors, and consultants who are needed to keep the operations running and assure the residents' needs are met; government officials who in their capacity require entry (e.g., CDC or public health staff); and immediate families or friends who need to visit for critical or time sensitive reasons such as hospice-related visits or to complete medical authorizations. These visitors should be instructed to limit their movement within the facility.



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Early reporting from scientists and clinicians at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Johns Hopkins indicate that people over the age of 60 are more likely to contract COVID-19 and people over 80 with underlying medical conditions are much more likely to die from this coronavirus. Nursing homes in Maryland and across the nation care for older patients and residents who are most often medically complex with underlying health conditions such as congestive heart failure, lung disease, and diabetes.

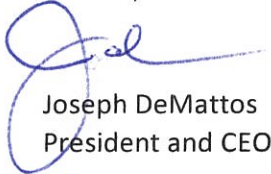
Resident and staff safety are a top priority for HFAM and our members, as well as for skilled nursing and rehabilitation centers across the country. If past viruses and flu seasons are any indication, the COVID-19 outbreak will get worse before it gets better. We could very well be continuing this fight long enough for the development of a vaccine a year from now. In the meantime, we will do our best work working together to mitigate the spread and protect those most at risk.

We have been and will continue to work closely with your office, the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), the Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ), the Maryland Hospital Association (MHA) and individual hospital partners, as well as MedChi, to ask that nursing homes inventory protective gear, review staffing, and foster partnerships with other centers and hospitals ahead of the storm of COVID-19. In addition, we have and will continue to broadcast information and share guidance from state and federal agencies.

Again, I want to thank you and your team for your leadership on the emerging public health impact of COVID-19 and to pledge our continued vigilant partnership. We at HFAM will do everything in our power to ensure that the organizations providing quality care to Marylanders in need have the tools and resources necessary to navigate this developing national public health emergency.

In order to protect residents and staff that provide quality care every day to those in need, it is critical to sign an order and put in place the visitation and screening recommendations of AHCA/NCAL for skilled nursing facilities and assisted living campuses in Maryland.

Be well,



Joseph DeMattos
President and CEO

CC: The Honorable Robert R. Neall, Maryland Secretary of Health
Fran Phillips, Maryland Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services
Dr. Tricia Nay, Executive Director, Maryland Office of Health Care Quality
HFAM Board of Directors