

To: The Honorable Senator Sarah Gelser, Chair  
Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

From: Katrina Hedberg, MD, MPH, Senior Public Health Physician

Date: March 18, 2021

Re: SB 714, Relating to residential care facility staffing

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Anderson, Senator Lieber, Senator Robinson and Senator Taylor:

I retired in 2019 as State Health Officer with the Oregon Health Authority, where I had worked for 29 years. I am providing testimony as a private citizen to urge you to support SB 714, which establishes minimum staffing levels for residential care facilities and those with memory care endorsements.

My 94 year old mother moved into an assisted living facility in April 2019 after my 99 year old father died. Prior to that time, my parents had lived independently in the same house in Corvallis for 60+ years. Thankfully, my mother is cognitively intact but having had rheumatoid arthritis for 50 years, uses walker and needs some assistance with cooking, cleaning, laundry and bathing.

While we were very hopeful that an assisted living facility would provide her with the help she needs, our experience over the past 2 years has been very mixed. Per the contract, all residents are supposed to have quarterly care planning meetings. While this happened during my mother's first year, she had NO service plan updates during 2020. These meetings are key for assessing whether residents are getting the care that they need.

Several issues have arisen that relate to inadequate staffing. Over the past year, she has lost almost 10% of her body weight, and now weighs only 100 pounds. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the facility closing the dining room and having food delivered to the residents' rooms. My mother reports that the food often arrives cold, or is food meant for another resident; twice no dinners were delivered at all. When my mother called for a care giver, they mentioned that the kitchen was closed and no additional food was available. I have had to buy food for my mother to keep in her refrigerator to ensure that she has something to eat for every meal.

My mother is supposed to get assistance with weekly showering. Several times she reports that no one has come to help her, and care givers report that due to minimal staffing on the floor, they are not able to assist her while keeping up with other residents' needs. Similarly, the contract stipulates weekly cleaning of her apartment, yet if the primary housekeeping staff are out sick, she may not have her rooms cleaned, or laundry done for two or more weeks.

There has been extensive turn-over of both management as well as care staff. Since April 2019, the facility has been managed by two different management companies, and has had four executive directors. The care staff turn-over is even more apparent, resulting in staff being only minimally trained. When she first moved in, my mother worked hard to learn the names of care staff but has given up due to the constant turn-over.

With the aging of the population, it is important that we have good options for residential care of older adults. Good care depends on having adequate staffing numbers and training to meet the needs of the residents in these facilities. I urge you to support SB 714.

Thank you for your consideration.