**SUBJECT: Please Re-consider Family Visitation Guidance for Nursing Home Residents**

As the family member/loved one of a nursing home resident I am deeply concerned about the impact of strict limits on visitation. Many residents are going on 7 months without visitation from their loved ones and as a result these seniors are showing signs of depression, anxiety, and related physical decline as a result of this social isolation. The dedicated staff at my loved one’s facility are doing their very best to find ways to otherwise connect residents to their families. However, under the current visitation guidance there is little that can be done to provide residents the loving interactions they need and deserve.

I understand that the Department of Health has issued guidance to nursing homes allowing visits and social activities, provided that stringent conditions are met and guidelines are followed. While I appreciate the state’s effort to lessen restrictions for family visitation, the current guidance still makes it challenging to hold social and religious activities for residents. For example, under current guidance, there must be no staff or resident covid-19 positive test result within 14 days in order to allow visits from families, by clergy, on-site social activities among residents, and certain on-site medical, dental and religious services. With the holidays and cold weather approaching, I’m terribly concerned that my loved one will be deprived of the traditions that have given them comfort throughout their entire life, and additionally, we will be prevented from spending time with them during those cherished holidays.

While the current guidance represents a necessary first step to re-allowing visitation in nursing home settings, it is now time for a more reasonable approach to family visitation that would truly allow isolated seniors to connect with their loved ones and enhance their quality of life. Importantly, on September 17th the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued new guidance for visitation in nursing homes during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The CMS guidance is in many ways more flexible and makes the overall wellbeing of residents a clear priority. However, New York State has yet to adopt these CMS recommendations into the State’s visitation guidance.

 Well thought-out and reasonable plans are critical to the overall wellbeing of residents and staff of nursing homes across the state. The negative impact of these strict family visitation requirements on seniors is self-evident. My loved one and the other seniors residing in skilled nursing facilities deserve to see their families. Their health, happiness and quality of life depend on it.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue,

Name

City, State