***Subject: State Must Reconsider Costly Testing Mandate for Nursing Homes and ACFs***

Dear Governor/Commissioner/Senator/Assembly Member,

I am writing you today as a direct care worker of a not-for-profit, mission-driven nursing home/ ACF. Over the last several months, long-term care providers and the vulnerable populations we serve have been severely impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Nursing homes and ACFs specifically have faced numerous operational and regulatory challenges around testing, patient protective equipment (PPE), staffing, and more.

Every day, my colleagues and I are working tirelessly to keep our residents safe from COVID-19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have followed CMS, CDC, and DOH guidance and additionally implemented our own best practices for infection control, testing, etc. We have done this diligent work while receiving far less support from the State than other provider types. When the virus’ hold on the State was at its height, long term care providers had to fight for adequate PPE, sometimes without success. When our colleagues were required to stay home for precautionary quarantine, we did not have the testing to determine whether or not they could keep working. As a result, we have been working double shifts and exceedingly long hours for months. We have been short staffed and providing the best care possible with little support and acknowledgment from the State.

When the Governor mandated twice-weekly staff testing, my colleagues worked urgently to arrange for testing on a very aggressive timeframe. However, meeting this new requirement is coming at a great cost to my organization, my colleagues and the residents we serve. While testing is an important component of infection control, the staff testing mandate is invasive, inefficient and costly. Due to the backlog of testing results and the days-long waiting period, my colleagues and I often don’t know the results of one test before having to be tested for the second time that week. Some people in our field have been tested as many as five times and have yet to receive a result.

Additionally, the time it takes to be tested and further document that testing takes away valuable time that could be used to care for residents. This time is even more valuable due to the Department of Health’s stringent return-to-work requirements, which exceed CDC recommendations and unnecessarily exclude staff from the facility for prolonged periods. The test is extremely invasive and often painful. Furthermore, the frequency at which we are being required to be tested far exceeds requirements of other healthcare provider types - such as hospitals - who are also serving vulnerable populations.

New York’s nursing homes and ACFs are under significant pressure as we do our very best to protect residents from COVID-19. I am a proud direct care worker and I have been disappointed by the lack of support being given to long-term care providers and staff who are serving our most vulnerable. We are a mission-driven organization, operating with fewer staff and more costs than ever, and we are doing our best to maintain a positive and comfortable quality of life for our residents during this stressful time.

**I urge the State and lawmakers to provide reimbursement to nursing homes and ACFs to cover the costs of the Executive’s testing mandate, as well as financial relief from the mounting costs of the pandemic. I also urge you to provide relief to direct care workers, who have selflessly served the elderly throughout the pandemic, by reconsidering the testing mandate and moving toward more reasonable testing and return to work requirements.**

Thank you for your time,

Name

Organization

Contact