

Another Voice: NY's financial squeeze harming the long-term care industry

- Robert T. Mayer

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on seniors and the people who care for them in the Buffalo area and across the country.

Covid-19 has hit providers of long-term care services particularly hard. We depend on nursing homes and assisted living facilities to care for some of our most vulnerable neighbors, friends and family members. Since the beginning of the pandemic nearly 20 months ago, these facilities, home to individuals impacted most severely by the coronavirus, have been working tirelessly to provide the best possible care to their residents and patients.

But it has not been easy. During the pandemic, the cost of caring for individuals receiving long-term care services skyrocketed because of New York State-mandated staff testing, shortages and inflated prices of personal protective equipment, overtime, shift differentials and other expenses to help ensure appropriate levels of staffing.

But despite these mandates and increases in expenses, in 2020, a year dominated by the pandemic, New York State cut nursing home rates by \$168 million annually and enacted budget legislation aimed at reducing overall long-term care spending by \$3.5 billion over two years.

These pandemic-related cost increases and reimbursement cuts have exacerbated existing financial instability among long-term care providers due to inadequate Medicaid rates coming from the state. There has been no cost-of-living increase for long-term care providers in 14 years, and over the last four years, New York has cut Medicaid reimbursement of long-term care providers by more than \$750 million.

To make matters worse, unprecedented workforce shortages are contributing to the challenges facing long-term care providers and the families who depend on them. Here in Buffalo and across New York State, many providers have suspended admissions and closed units because they are

unable to find sufficient staff. Weinberg Campus has had no choice but to limit admissions as a direct result of staffing shortages and a commitment to ensuring high-quality, safe care.

The long-standing lack of funding and support is now explicitly manifesting itself in lack of care options for our most vulnerable, and a back-up in hospital discharges for individuals who require rehabilitation or ongoing care.

We are hopeful that Gov. Kathy Hochul and the new leadership in Albany will take immediate action to address the unprecedented stress that the long-term care system is experiencing.

We are valuable community resources, staffed by committed individuals who dedicate themselves to caring for vulnerable members of our community. We owe them and the residents they serve all the resources and support they deserve.

Robert T. Mayer is president and CEO of Weinberg Campus in Getzville.