



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10
215 West 125th Street, 4th Floor—New York, NY 10027
T: 212-749-3105 F: 212-662-4215

CICELY HARRIS
Chairperson

SHATIC MITCHELL
District Manager

April 25, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

It has come to my attention that a lawsuit has been filed in Manhattan Federal Court against the Harlem Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation located in our community board district. The suit alleges that this nursing home let a ninety-two-year-old grandmother's body decay in a storage closet for five days after she passed away on December 4th 2019. The corpse was in such a poor shape that it had to be cremated immediately. These are the type of stories that we hear about in our community and there is a growing concern amongst our constituents that the treatment and care our elders are receiving in nursing homes and rehabilitation centers, are below standards amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

In Central Harlem, Covid-19 is having devastating effects on the African American community. Older adults are one of the most vulnerable populations for contracting a severe case of the coronavirus. New York's growing older adult population is facing unprecedented barriers accessing meals, groceries, medicine, and support services, and new levels of social isolation brought on by the coronavirus. According to reports "The prevalence of health conditions amongst the African American community such as high blood pressure, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, asthma, cancer, HIV/AIDS and how they are treated by the medical establishment have created a toxic storm of severe illness and death. When combined with Covid-19 people already suffering from chronic illnesses suffer the worst health outcomes and these underlying conditions increase the chances of death."

I commend your office and the NYS Department of Health for releasing the New York state survey identifying elder care facilities that have had at least five residents die over the past few weeks. Since that time we have learned of the staggering amount of deaths in our senior facilities as well as the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) and staffing shortages. Since the earliest days of the outbreak nursing homes have emerged as hotbeds

for the virus to spread through the at-risk population of senior citizens, indicating that one in every five of New York State's Covid-19 fatalities died inside a nursing home. An AP report found infections were continuing to find their way into nursing homes because screening staff for a fever or questioning them about symptoms didn't catch people who were infected but asymptomatic. At least five of the nursing homes have had more than 40 deaths each, all of them in New York City.

New York City is home to more than 1.7 million people age 60 and over, an all-time high. This includes more than 141,000 residents who are over the age of 85, more than 136,000 who are homebound, and one in five who are living below the federal poverty line. Older New Yorkers not only account for the lion's share of deaths from the virus—70 percent of those succumbing to the virus were age 65 and over as of April 1, 2020.

Governor Cuomo, we applaud your executive order requiring skilled nursing facilities, nursing homes and adult care facilities to notify family members or next of kin within 24 hours if any resident tests positive for Covid-19. We also understand that the previous state guidance on reporting requirements were previously being ignored. Until this past week, officials in several states had declined to identify nursing homes with deadly outbreaks, saying patients deserved privacy or citing challenges in determining whether some extremely frail patients had died of the virus, or other causes. Many nursing home administrators also declined to release information. This leads us to believe that the numbers might be generally underreported at nursing homes. Officials say the numbers very well might be larger and will grow. At this point, the state depends on the nursing homes self reporting.

At this time, we are requesting greater oversight, compliance, stricter enforcement, accurate reporting, data collection, and **mandatory Covid-19 testing at all of our senior nursing facilities and rehabilitation centers in our city immediately**. This pandemic is exposing a deep-rooted system of the haves and have-nots. We expect nothing but the best care and treatment for our senior population at nursing homes, long term care facilities and senior centers.

Sincerely,



Dr. Hazel Dukes
Chairwoman
Manhattan Community Board 10
Health & Human Services Committee

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