



Testimony of Tara Gregorio

HB 4635, An Act Relative to Long Term Care Facility and Elder Housing COVID-19 Reporting
Presented to the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs – April 16, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on **House Bill 4635**, *An Act Relative to Long Term Care Facility and Elder Housing COVID-19 Reporting*. My name is Tara Gregorio, President of the Massachusetts Senior Care Association. The continuing rise in the number of fatal cases among the 38,000 frail elderly and disabled residents living in the Commonwealth's nursing facilities is devastating to our residents, families and staff who are courageously battling the most horrific pandemic in our lifetimes. On behalf of the Mass Senior Care Association, we extend our deepest and sincerest condolences to the families of residents and their caregivers who have lost their lives to this insidious virus.

We along with our member facilities continue to work closely with public health agencies and the CDC to take all efforts and precautions to contain and mitigate COVID-19 from entering long term care facilities. The elderly, especially those living in skilled nursing facilities, rest homes and assisted living residences, remain particularly vulnerable to contracting the COVID-19 virus and those with underlying health conditions are especially at risk. Despite all of the current collective mitigation efforts and the dedication of our frontline staff, the virus has sadly robbed the lives of residents living in long term care facilities too soon.

Consistent with House Bill 4635 skilled nursing facilities are taking the necessary steps to inform families of residents, staff, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and their local boards of health when a positive case of COVID-19 is present. The reporting is completed by nursing facilities through the Department of Public Health's epidemiology line, Department of Public Health's Health Care Facility Reporting System (HCFRS), local and municipal board of health, and



the Massachusetts Mutual Aid Program (MassMAP) which is shared with the Department of Public Health. Given the current state of the pandemic, Mass Senior Care would recommend to the Committee that such reporting in the legislation would be collected through an existing system which long term care facility staff have experience using.

Given the severity of the pandemic and its disproportionate impact on nursing facilities, we are in dire need of additional resources to protect residents and the caregivers who are on the front lines of this crisis. Together with the Commonwealth and hospital partners, we must redouble our efforts to support and protect our nursing home residents and staff in three very simple, actionable ways:

- 1) We urgently need emergency funding to immediately pay a “hero” wage to our frontline staff and hire an additional 12,000 workers to join us in fighting to protect our residents against this insidious and devastating virus;
- 2) We must protect our caregivers and thereby the residents they care for by ensuring that all frontline staff have the necessary personal protective equipment, including masks, gowns, eye shields and gloves; and
- 3) Expand surveillance COVID-19 testing to include both symptomatic and asymptomatic residents and frontline staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. We look forward to working with the Committee and staff to protect the most vulnerable population affected by this vicious virus.