

[SAMPLE LETTER CALLING FOR SAFE NURSING HOME STAFFING LEVELS]

Dear [Senator or Congressperson XXXX]:

I am writing to you on behalf of [INSERT YOUR ORGANIZATION NAME HERE], to ask you to take a stand to help the vulnerable people in nursing homes in our community and across the country. Rather than being cared for, many nursing home residents are faced with painful, often heart-breaking, conditions. These are our parents and grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends. They turn to a nursing home in need of help, but too often what they get is anguish – insufficient staff to help them walk to the bathroom, eat a nutritious meal or even to assist them to move them around in bed. As a result, unnecessary incontinence, malnourishment and painful bedsores are major problems for many nursing home residents.

As a lawmaker, you have a critical role in ensuring that residents live safely, with dignity and adequate care. Twenty years ago, in the face of terrible scandals in the nursing home industry, Congress passed and President Reagan signed into law the Nursing Home Reform Law (OBRA 87) which set strong standards for nursing homes. While there have been some improvements since that deplorable time, too many nursing homes continue to flout the law, providing inadequate care and quality of life to our loved ones. After 20 years of industry resistance and persistent widespread problems, not to mention increased dependence on our tax dollars for revenue, the time has come to require that nursing homes that take our loved ones and our money be required to have adequate staffing.

Study after study has indicated that sufficient staffing is the key to good care in nursing homes. Yet a 2002 report by the federal government found that over 90% of U.S. nursing homes lack adequate staff. This is outrageous. Nursing homes which receive our money and are entrusted with our loved ones must be required to have sufficient care staff.

There are two things that you can do:

1. Support federal legislation like the Nursing Home Staffing Act (H.R. 4293, introduced in 2005) that would require safe yet reasonable staffing levels.
2. Call for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to enact nurse staffing ratios to ensure that facilities employ sufficient staff to care to residents.

The nursing home industry will say they can't afford to increase staffing. But that argument ignores the tremendous financial costs of inadequate care from things like increased hospitalization, medication and rehab; worker turnover and Medicaid fraud. Not to mention industry profiteering, as highlighted in the recent *NY Times* report "More Profit and Less Nursing at Many Homes" (Sep. 23, 2007). The real question is: "how much longer can we afford *not* to mandate adequate staff?"

I look forward to hearing from you on this very important issue.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

P.S. The average nursing home resident lives there for two years. That means that if a bill were to pass this year and go into effect next year, an entire generation of residents would come and go without seeing any relief. Your action on this issue is needed now.