

[SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR: For practically no cost at all, you can influence the minds and hearts of others in your community by writing letters to the editor of your local paper. The editorial pages are the most read pages of any paper.]

Dear Editor:

I am writing as a member of the community who is deeply concerned about the quality of nursing home care. [ PLEASE ADD 2-3 SENTENCES HERE ABOUT THE PROBLEMS YOU OR YOUR LOVED ONE ENCOUNTERED. If possible, describe how they related to lack of staffing.]

Poor care in nursing homes is not something that we must simply accept. Every year we give nursing home providers billions of dollars and entrust them with our most frail loved ones. Meanwhile, laws requiring that every nursing home resident receive enough care to receive their "highest practicable" physical and mental well being are too often ignored. Your readers may be surprised to know that there is no requirement for specific numbers of nursing home staff. The law merely says that facilities must have "sufficient staff" to provide this level of care. Unfortunately, this is too vague a requirement, resulting in widespread indignity and suffering. It is time that our political leaders require that nursing homes maintain specific safe staffing levels if they want to receive our money and be entrusted with our loved ones.

I urge your readers to tell their representatives in Congress that the time is now to mandate minimum staffing requirements. A federal study in 2001 found that approximately 4.2 hours of staff time per day is needed to provide decent care and quality of life. Urge members of Congress to support the Nursing Home Staffing Act and also to call on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which generated the 2001 study, to require nursing homes to meet this standard. After all, some day all of our lives might depend upon it.

Sincerely,