

RELEASE SENIOR AID



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Guest Columnist

The Biden administration has made combating the COVID pandemic a top priority but has not targeted available resources to protect senior citizens.

Pennsylvania senior living communities that have fought to safeguard seniors for the last 18 months need access to federal assistance now, or many will close, creating a housing crisis at the exact moment that seniors need safe places to live.

Time and again during the pandemic, seniors in personal care and assisted living communities have been left behind.

Personal care and assisted living caregivers have been leading the way to protect the seniors who call these communities home. They acted swiftly to establish new health protocols, add personal protective equipment, enhance infection prevention and control measures, and support employees who accepted greater risk themselves with benefits like hero pay.

Nearly two-thirds of assisted living facilities report no COVID-related deaths, highlighting the effectiveness of preventive efforts. But Pennsylvania senior living communities incurred more than \$2 billion in lost revenue and expenses due to the related slowdown in incoming residents while facilities remained locked down. Nationwide, senior living communities have suffered nearly \$30 billion in losses.

Almost 30 personal care communities in Pennsylvania have closed since the beginning of the pandemic.

In 2020, bipartisan legislation in Congress created a Provider Relief Fund and supplied it with \$178 billion to offset these losses and ensure that senior living communities remained open. It has been more than 500 days since the Provider Relief Fund was signed into law and \$14 billion remains undistributed despite a resurgent virus. Of the money that has been distributed less than 1% has gone to senior

living communities. In Pennsylvania, our 1,195 assisted living communities collectively have received less than \$43 million in federal aid to address more than \$2 billion in expenses and losses.

Members of Congress from both parties have recognized that failure to distribute federal relief funds quickly and equitably is not a path out of the pandemic, but a path toward bankruptcy. A bipartisan group of senators, including Sen. Bob Casey of Scranton, have urged the Biden administration to act, writing: "Immediate targeted financial relief that equitably provides resources to these caregivers as other comparable long-term care providers is necessary. These resources will help offset the continued expenses for PPE, staffing, infection prevention and control, vaccine administration, and testing."

The administration's inaction means financial peril for senior living caregivers as the delta variant of COVID continues to impact daily life.

The more than 70,000 seniors who reside in Pennsylvania's assisted living facilities cannot afford continued inaction. Each day that passes without targeted provider relief to impacted communities brings them another day closer to their community closing, putting them on the street while COVID still stalks vulnerable populations.

The administration immediately should direct U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra to provide targeted provider relief funds to health care providers, including senior living caregivers, quickly and equitably and help us protect Pennsylvania's vulnerable senior citizens.

Mr. President, don't leave Pennsylvania's seniors behind, again.

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