

Written Testimony of



Delivered by

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**An Informational Hearing on Personal Care
Homes and Assisted Living Facilities**

**Delivered before the
House Aging & Older Adult Services and
Human Services Committees**

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Chairwoman Kim, Chairmen Kinsey, Heffley and Mentzer, and members of both the House Aging & Older Adults Services and Human Services Committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and offer input from the community that is providing care and living accommodations for adults across the commonwealth.

My name is David Zilka, and I am the executive director of Paxton Ministries, a nonprofit organization that provides care for adults — both old and young — who live with mental health needs, intellectual disabilities, and are challenged with poverty. I'm speaking before you today as both a provider and a representative of the Pennsylvania Health Care Association — or PHCA — who advocates on behalf of nearly 450 long-term care facilities across the state. I serve on PHCA's assisted living and personal care Board of Directors, and as a state representative at the national level with the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL). Wearing all of these hats today, I am happy to be able to share a perspective from within a personal care home, and provide a greater understanding of what is happening with our long-term care continuum at the state and national levels.

The purpose of this testimony is to speak about the community I serve and what is happening with senior living and the care of adults with disabilities across the state.

Paxton Ministries is located in Harrisburg and has been around for nearly 45 years. For those on the committee with districts neighboring the Paxton Street Home, you understand the value of our mission and how we support your constituents who live with disabilities and have very little income to support their needs.

Our home has capacity for 85 residents and currently we are struggling to hire the necessary workers needed to care for that many people, so some beds sit empty. With an already shallow workforce pool and inadequate government funds to provide care we are fighting to keep pace with rising costs and our need to offer competitive wages. To be exact, funds our residents receive to pay for their housing, meals and care only covers about 40-50% of actual costs. Those funds primarily are in the form of the Supplemental Security Income or SSI.

We do receive funding support from Dauphin County which pays to assist in the cost of about 40 beds for mental health care. This demonstrates the needs for care as the county is willing to assist our mission with funding because many of these individuals would otherwise have nowhere else to go.

Why is that?

Our long-term care continuum, which serves more than just seniors, has often been an unfortunate after-thought. Providers in this sector serve our communities most vulnerable and serve as main cog in the entire health care continuum to ensure hospitals don't capsize with an overwhelming amount of patients. Yet, there remains a constant struggle for long-term care providers to receive adequate funding for care. This is a primary reason why we have seen so many long-term care communities close within recent years — because the needs only

continue to rise and the funding isn't there to support it. For personal care homes, Pennsylvania currently has 105 less homes today than it did in 2019.

Pennsylvania's 85 and older population is expected to nearly double by 2030 from where we were in 2020. This is our fastest growing demographic. More people are going to continue to need the level of care nursing homes, assisted living residences and personal care homes offer. We are also seeing a constant increase in the reliance on government services to pay for care — this is SSI and Medicaid. All the while homelessness across the country among seniors is dramatically increasing. A study from the University of Pennsylvania suggests that by 2030 the national homeless rate among adults 65 and older is projected to nearly triple from the rate it was at in 2019. When that happens, where will everyone go?

With the challenges we — the providers — currently face to offer care, I fear what is to come for our communities if we don't start supporting our vulnerable neighbors today.

There are things your committees can do to help. It starts with discussions like this. Meet with the providers — the last line of defense for the care of so many vulnerable residents across our commonwealth. Understand the importance of your role to help fund the services we provide. Recognize that there are legislative efforts that can support access to care and regulatory requirements that mean-well though can harm access to care.

I recently had multiple residents that needed more care than we could provide. One resident waited over two years for that care. Why? Because our other partners in the long-term care continuum have waitlists for people trying to get in. Because many providers don't have enough staff to meet the level of care my residents need. And because my residents can't pay for care on their own — underfunded government assistance programs make it more difficult for an individual reliant on those programs to be admitted somewhere else. Our mission is to meet the care needs of others. And that is a mission that every elected official should be a part of.

You can help expand care by supporting legislation like Senate Bill 520 which will allow for some of my residents to transition to assisted living communities to receive more care and have Medicaid cover some of the costs. In Pennsylvania, nursing homes are the only Medicaid-eligible provider. Not having this option costs the state more money and leads to capacity issues in nursing homes. Pennsylvania is one of only a handful of states that doesn't allow Medicaid in assisted living communities.

You can help with our workforce struggles. PHCA has worked with some members of your committees and staff to develop legislative solutions that will support our workforce growth. Helping to grow our workforce is more critical now than it ever has been before. You are probably aware of the new nursing home staffing regulations Pennsylvania adopted, which are set to increase again next year. Nursing homes are struggling to hire staff and I fear that my own staff could be lured away to fill those positions. Complicating matters is a federal staffing regulation that has been proposed that will require even more workers than what Pennsylvania is regulating for nursing homes. Aside from the negative thought of Paxton losing staff in the

process, I fear my residents will have to wait even longer — possibly more than two years — to receive nursing care, because those providers are being forced to take less residents to meet the staffing requirements.

Lastly, you have already helped by passing legislation last year that further protects residents and providers by regulating and instituting oversight on staffing agencies. Nine months ago this new legislative directive was supposed to be enforced by the Department of Health. We are still waiting for that to happen. The reliance on very costly contracted workers is growing by the day, and without this regulation being enforced, the Department of Health is enabling a scary environment where these agencies aren't being policed to ensure the credibility of the caregivers they are sending to our buildings.

There is a lot that we can discuss. And I am always happy to have a conversation about the mission of Paxton Ministries and the many long-term care providers across the state trying to provide care. But being mindful of time, I will conclude my remarks and welcome any questions.