



GEAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

James W. Dvorak Timothy C. Lennon Ralph Spidalieri

470 Center Street • Building 4 • Chardon, Ohio 44024-1071

*Department on Aging
470 Center Street, Bldg #2
Chardon, Ohio 44024*

*Jessica N. Boalt MMT, MT-BC
Director
JBoalt@co.geauga.oh.us*

Interested Party Testimony Before the House Aging and Long-Term Care Committee

Jessica N. Boalt

May 27, 2020

Chair Ginter, Ranking Member Howse, and members of the committee, I am Jessica Boalt, Director of the Geauga County Department on Aging. The Geauga County Department on Aging is the senior services provider for Geauga County, Ohio. The mission of the Geauga County Department on Aging is to support positive aging through programs, services and resources that promote health, wellness, safety, independence and dignity. We appreciate the opportunity to offer written testimony regarding the impact of State orders on our local nursing homes and long-term care facilities as well as offer recommendations for the State to consider in relation to Covid-19 based upon the feedback our Agency has received from leaders in our local long-term care community.

The Covid-19 crisis has impacted the rural County of Geauga, our aging population and most significantly those in nursing homes. We have observed the devastation from leaders in our nursing home community as they initially reached out to our Agency while searching for Personal Protective Equipment, resources to assist the psychosocial and recreational well-being of their residents, and emotional support for their healthcare professionals.

Our Agency watched as one local nursing home had 60% of their residents and a large amount of their workforce test positive for Covid-19. And then, one impacted nursing home became two and then two impacted nursing homes became five. We have been told by local nursing home leaders that that they have never seen community or healthcare come together as they did in response to this crisis. Our local hospital-UH Geauga Medical Center, hospice providers and other healthcare professionals assisted to provide aid to local nursing homes through staffing and the County's Emergency Service Department assisted by providing Personal Protective Equipment, driving from Geauga County to Columbus to pick the supplies up personally so that nursing homes could have access to them as soon as possible.

After speaking with local nursing home leaders and asking them for their input in regards to recommendations for the State to consider, I was given the following three recommendations:

1. Due to the increased cost to treat residents with Covid-19 and due to the increased cost of payroll to provide coverage for ill staff, it was recommended that the bed tax is waived for unoccupied nursing home beds in an effort for local nursing homes to weather through the financial burden brought about by Covid-19.
2. Provide a State resource for staffing assistance
3. Maintain higher quantities of Personal Protective Equipment

In addition to observing the hardships and challenges from local nursing home leaders, my Agency has also listened to the many frustrations, concerns and fears from those whose family members are residing in local long-term care facilities.

The families we have had the privilege to speak with have praised the care their loved ones have received at our local nursing homes and have continued to do so during this difficult time. However, these family members have expressed heartache and fear by not being physically able to be with their loved ones.

One family member in particular has not seen her mother, who suffers from end stage Alzheimer's disease, since the end of February 2020. She has told me numerous times that she lives in daily fear that she will get "the call", that her mother will be infected by this virus and she will never see her mother again, or if she somehow would, her mother would not recognize her.

We have also heard stories from families whose loved ones became infected and died from this virus. They have shared their heartbreaking story of saying "good-bye" through a window to an unresponsive loved one, last rights being provided out side of a window and their fear that their love one died alone.

I have asked my local nursing home leaders and family members to provide testimony to tell their stories. If there is an opportunity in the future for them to do so my Agency will be happy to provide a forum for their testimonies.

I thank you for the opportunity to share with you today observations, recommendations and experiences my office has had over the course of the last 2 ½ months with local nursing homes and families impacted by Covid-19.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jessica Boalt-May 27, 2020