



COMMISSION ON AGING

June 18, 2020

Robert R. Neall, Secretary
Maryland Department of Health
201 W. Preston Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Re: COVID-19 testing in Assisted Living Facilities

Dear Secretary Neall:

The Commission on Aging is authorized by the Older Americans Act and was established by Montgomery County in 1974 to advise County government on the needs, interests, and issues of older adult residents, and to advocate on their behalf at the local, state, and national levels. During the current health care crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, we have particular concern for the most vulnerable segment of our population, those residing in nursing homes and assisted living facilities—a group that has borne the overwhelming impact of the disease.

The Commission acknowledges the emphasis state agencies have made for testing of residents and facility staff in nursing homes. However, in light of our understanding that many (if not most) residents in assisted living facilities are as vulnerable as those in nursing homes, assisted living residents should be protected by the same practices. Accordingly, the Commission urges the Montgomery County Council to require assisted living facilities to adhere to the same testing protocols for COVID-19 issued by the appropriate government agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as for nursing homes. In the event conditions in Montgomery County warrant more stringent testing requirements than those recommended by the CDC, these should apply to assisted living facilities as well.

We also have concerns about the frequency of testing of staff and other workers who come in contact with residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities. There is strong evidence that facility personnel (particularly those who are employed in more than one facility) are a key source of coronavirus infection among residents. Therefore, we also urge the Council to ensure that testing be conducted with sufficient frequency to minimize the risk of worker-transmitted infection to the resident population and that test results be validated by appropriate scientific methods.

Finally, the Commission notes the ongoing and pressing need for public education to ensure that County residents have objective information from trusted sources to guide their behavior during this pandemic episode. We encourage the Council to ensure that adequate resources are directed to a robust public education initiative.

We appreciate your ongoing commitment to older adults in Montgomery County and across the State of Maryland, especially in these unprecedented times, and we thank you for your consideration of our views.

Jean Dinwiddie, Chair



Commission on Aging

cc: Patricia Tomsko Nay, Executive Director, Office of Healthcare Quality
Rona Kramer, Secretary, Maryland Department on Aging
Delores Kelly, Maryland State Senator
Marc Elrich, Montgomery County Executive
Raymond Crowel, Director, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Travis Gayles, Montgomery County Chief Health Officer
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