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NYS Health Facilities Association Statement on COVID-19 Pandemic in Long Term Care Facilities

Albany, New York — Stephen Hanse, President and CEO of the New York State Health Facilities Association and the New York State Center for Assisted Living (NYSHFA/NYSCAL) issued the following statement in response to rising number of COVID-19 outbreaks and fatalities in New York’s nursing homes and assisted living communities:

“We continue to be deeply concerned about the high mortality rate and how widespread COVID-19 has become in long-term care facilities. From the onset of this pandemic, nursing homes and assisted living providers have been the proverbial canary in the coal mine as to the devastation this virus can impose, and we must receive priority status for assistance with staffing, PPE shortages and testing to protect our residents and staff.

“As the Governor stated, COVID-19 spreads through nursing homes ‘like fire through dry grass.’ While the focus has often been on hospitals, the figures confirm what we have been saying all along - that nursing homes and assisted living providers care for the most vulnerable in our communities and are the most susceptible to this virus.

“Outbreaks of COVID-19 are not the result of inattentiveness or shortcomings in our facilities. The very nature of long-term care is a high touch environment where social distancing is not an option in providing care. Staff are hands-on helping residents with bathing, dressing, eating and other personal daily needs.

“The Governor has stated that ‘nursing homes are the State’s #1 concern.’ As such, three things are essential for us to stop this virus - skilled nursing and assisted facilities must 1) be designated as top priorities for staffing assistance, 2) receive sufficient PPE and 3) all residents and staff must be tested for COVID-19. All three of these are critical to safeguard our most vulnerable citizens and the men and women who provide essential care.

“The State must also modify the Department of Health’s March 25th Advisory requiring nursing homes to admit medically stable hospital patients with a confirmed or suspected diagnosis of COVID-19 to apply only in those exigent circumstances where the referring hospital is experiencing an overcapacity surge situation.

“Nursing homes and assisted living providers have been informing designated family members of positive COVID-19 tests and the presence of COVID-19 in buildings throughout this pandemic. Moreover, providers have continually submitted COVID-19 information to state and local health departments.

“Skilled nursing and assisted living facilities are highly regulated by the government and almost 80% of residents in nursing homes rely on State Medicaid to ensure their care. As such, the State must maintain current Medicaid funding levels for these essential providers and provide additional needed financial resources to address the unprecedented costs of this pandemic.

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