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NYS Health Facilities Association Statement on Long Term Care Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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 the number of COVID-19 outbreaks and fatalities in New York’s nursing homes and assisted living communities:

“It’s been said that blame is a lazy person’s way of making sense of chaos. And as New York navigates the unprecedented chaos created by COVID-19, it is human nature to want to make sense of what is happening by finding something and someone to blame. Nowhere is the effort more focused than with the impact COVID-19 is inflicting upon the residents and staff of nursing homes and assisted living facilities in New York, the United States and throughout the world.

“Daniel Patrick Moynihan once stated that ‘everyone is entitled to their opinion but not their own facts.’ With regard to long term care and COVID-19 the facts are clear – due to advanced age and struggles with multiple chronic diseases and conditions, residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities everywhere are the most vulnerable population and the least able to withstand the insidious COVID-19 virus.

“The average age of a long-term care resident is 83 years old. According to the New York State Department of Health, individuals between the ages of 80 and 89 account for 25 percent of all COVID-19 related deaths in New York. Unfortunately, 85 percent of all New York’s 20,597 COVID-19 related deaths have occurred in persons aged 60 and above. And of this 85 percent, 89.4 percent of these individuals had at least one comorbidity. These disheartening figures are not unique to New York.

“The World Health Organization recently reported that nearly one-half of all COVID-19 related deaths in Europe occurred in long-term care facilities. In its report, the WHO highlighted the fact that residents in long-term care facilities are at the highest risk due to advanced age, multiple physical and/or mental disabilities coupled with several underlying health conditions and cognitive challenges. Additionally, both the Centers for Disease Control and CMS have acknowledged the fact that “nursing homes have been ground zero for COVID-19.”

“Outbreaks of COVID-19 are not the result of inattentiveness or shortcomings in long-term care facilities. While noting that nursing homes are ‘doing phenomenal work,’ Governor Cuomo recently stated that ‘whatever we do, nursing homes will always be a target for the COVID-19 virus.’ Long-term care is a high touch environment where social distancing is not an option in providing care. Additionally, the data shows that up to 25 percent of all COVID-19 infected individuals do not present any symptoms – making it virtually impossible to completely keep this virus out of any facility.

“As New Yorkers, we are all experiencing overwhelming adversity right now and must instinctively look for solutions not blame. We are all in this together, and together, each of our individual actions will safeguard our most vulnerable and lead us to collectively overcome our present circumstances and create a stronger and safer future.

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