

**Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis
Hearing on “Examining Long-Term Care in America: The Impact of the
Coronavirus in Nursing Homes”**

**Rachel Darden Bennett
Statement for the Record
September 21, 2022**

Good afternoon, Chairman Clyburn, and Members of the House of Representatives,

My name is Rachel Bennett and I’d like to share my experience both as the daughter of a mother, who lived in nursing homes for over six years, entering at just 58 years old due to early onset-Alzheimer’s, AND as someone who has gone on after my mother’s death to uplift the dignity and lives of people living in nursing homes. I am the Founder of The Nursing Home Card Project, an organization that encourages the community to alleviate the brutal loneliness nursing home residents experience every day by sending cards or singing within the hallways of nursing homes. I’m also a proud member of the Gray Panthers, an advocacy group for the elderly, where we strive to confront ageism and the many social justice issues within nursing homes

My late mother Shaunna Bennett, lived in three different nursing homes and in each one, I watched with horror, her pain, loneliness, isolation, and utter lack of basic care needs. My mother was lucky, however, because she had me. I fought and advocated for her relentlessly, but many residents have NO ONE. No family visits them. No one advocates them.

As a volunteer in many nursing homes, I consistently see that residents are not treating like human beings. Often their day is spent staring at blank walls and sitting in their own urine and feces. Basic care needs such as thirst, hunger, and toileting are not being met because the Federal Government has no MINIMUM REQUIREMENT in place for staffing. Nursing homes in every pocket of this nation are grossly understaffed, and it affects a resident’s life on every possible level. To quote HealthAffairs.org, due to a lack of adequate staffing which has long plagued nursing homes, but which Covid 19 revealed, “The harm to [frail older adults](#) can be quite severe—abuse and sexual assault, infections, overuse of psychotropic medications, pressure ulcers, falls with injuries, weight loss, dehydration, pain, and medication errors. Infection control [violations](#) have also been found repeatedly in a majority of nursing homes.”



We want the passage of a Minimum Staffing Law, so that nursing homes are properly staffed, and the rights guaranteed within the Residents Bill of Rights in the Nursing Home Reform Act are assuredly being met to protect and care for our vulnerable brothers and sisters.

We need you to hold Nursing Home operators accountable. Right now, Nursing homes have limited oversight or accountability for how Medicare/Medicaid CMS funds are spent. They are extracting as much profit as they can at the expense of the residents. Our elderly are not a commodity. We need to ensure that there is more transparency in how funds are spent to improve the lives of nursing home residents, so that they may live with dignity.

But that's not all. We need more that basic needs **for man cannot live on bread alone**. We need to enforce that government funds are allocated to **Activities and Recreation programs in every nursing home in this country**, providing residents with sensory engagement, such as music, art, and pet therapy? How will you regulate this on a federal level?



This is a national tragedy that no one talks about and very few see. We must not turn our backs on the sick and elderly. Christ says in Matthew 25:40 ***“Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”*** Nursing homes are THEIR homes. And very often, their last one. Know this, we cannot predict the future and whether you are a man or woman on Main Street or a Congressman or Congresswoman on Capitol Hill, age and sickness does not discriminate. This fate could be yours.

In the Nursing Home Resident's Bill of Rights, that SHOULD BE hanging in every nursing home in the country, the first line is, and I quote:

***“Nursing home residents have the right to:
“Dignity, respect and a comfortable living environment;”***

A few weeks ago, my fellow volunteers of the Nursing Home Card Project visited a nursing home and sang throughout the hallways to the residents. After finishing a song, a woman with an amputated leg proclaimed loudly with tears streaming down her face “thank you for not forgetting us.”

In my mother's late stages of dementia, she often screamed what felt like a declaration, a prayer, and a war cry. "I AM HERE! I AM HERE!"

They ARE here. And we will not forget them.

I've included a few photos of my mother, Shaunna Bennett, living in nursing homes.

Thank you.

