

## **Statement for the Record - House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis Hearing 9.21.22**

September, 21, 2022

Dear Honorable Chairman Jim Clyburn and Members of the House Select Subcommittee,

We are the residents of Coler Rehabilitation and Nursing Center, an H+H facility, located on Roosevelt Island in New York City. We are thankful for your attention to the issues surrounding our care and that of all residents in long-term care facilities. When it comes to discussing the care and treatment of people in residential healthcare facilities, our input needs to be a priority.

When NYC went into meltdown in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic and the numbers of infected kept rising, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that Coler would be accepting infected patients. “The Coler facility on Roosevelt Island, an H + H facility that was empty, it is being immediately brought back online—350 beds.” said de Blasio. “It will be ready in approximately a week’s time.” Except our facility wasn’t empty. About 500 of us were living here. Without warning or notice, the infected were moved onto our floors and into our rooms. We started to get sick and the bodies began to pile up. It wasn’t until we went to the media that people finally noticed and things began to change.

But that change is the equivalent of a Band-Aid applied to a hemorrhaging wound.

Today, we still struggle with a lack of communication with the administration, and must fight for the recognition that we are not a problem to solve, but people. It was when the world discovered what was happening inside Coler that the Coler Task Force was established. Made up of residents, the Ombudsman, local advocates, community policymakers and H+H administration, it is now a vehicle to elevate our voices and concerns, and hold the administration accountable. It is not perfect, but mostly works. Recently, the task force was able to prevent the unnecessary quarantine of an entire unit of residents when only five became positive. The current system of an Ombudsman and state surveyors is failing us residents when it comes to holding facilities accountable, especially during times of crisis. The Coler Task Force continues to be not only the amplification of our voice, but our insurance policy as we fight for our rights.

We believe that facility living does not mean a lack of rights. We propose the following Resident Bill of Rights, written by us, actual residents, to improve upon the current state of treatment of anyone living in long-term care.

### **#NURSINGHOMELIVESMATTER BILL OF RIGHTS**

We imagine long-term care where...

- Each person is treated as an individual, and we’re not all lumped together in the same box where the assumption is everyone is elderly and a nursing home is our last stop. For

some of us we have a lot more to see and do, while others have led full unique lives that should be honored and celebrated.

- Administrators come out of their offices and work at least one day on the units so they can see what's going on--how difficult it is when they give one nursing assistant 40 residents to care for and how important our individual needs are.
- The state does not give advance warning ahead of inspections, so nursing homes follow all proper, respectful, safe protocols at all times—not just during the lead-up to an upcoming evaluation.
- Residents are served delicious nourishing meals, not overcooked tasteless food that looks worse than what they serve in Rikers.
- Residents have 24/7 access to reliable fast wifi to connect with loved ones, view entertainment, and further our education and careers.
- Disability justice training is required for all staff.
- All staff receive a decent wage that they can support their families on and that reflects the dignity and importance of their work.
- Bring the love back to nursing—administrators must acknowledge and provide support to how nursing staff were put in danger during this pandemic, which caused so many to abandon the field, leaving us residents behind.
- There are safe staffing ratios so that no resident is ever left in bed ringing the bell for hours unable to go see family and/or in danger of developing deadly sores.
- Residents are informed immediately and clearly of all rules that affect us and we are included in all decision-making processes.
- Families are never locked out again no matter the circumstances; they should always be allowed to follow the same safety protocols of staff to enter facilities and visit their loved ones.
- Residents have resources and opportunity to develop our spiritual, recreational, creative and professional lives, and not warehoused like we are now.

The best way to improve long-term care is to provide those of us living it day-to-day a seat at the table. How can you make fair and effective policies regulating how we live without our input?

What happened in facilities during COVID-19 was not only a historic tragedy, it was a benchmark moment that illuminated the catastrophic level of brokenness of the system. Please work with us to end the racism, ableism and ageism in long-term care and turn this into historic change.

Signed,

Vince Pierce

Director, Open Doors NYC ([www.opendoorsnyc.org](http://www.opendoorsnyc.org))

Founder, #Nursing Home Lives Matter ([www.opendoorsnyc.org/nhlm](http://www.opendoorsnyc.org/nhlm))

Reality Poet

Coler Resident

The Residents of Coler Rehabilitation and Nursing Center  
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