

Senator Karin Housley

Proudly representing District 39



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May 6, 2020

Ms. Jan Malcolm, Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Health
625 N. Robert Street
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd
Saint Paul, MN 55155-2538

via electronic delivery

Dear Commissioner Malcolm:

First, I want to offer my sincere thanks to you and your staff for your commitment to the people of Minnesota. I appreciate the work you are doing under extremely challenging circumstances.

As you know, more than 80 percent (367 of 455) of fatalities due to COVID-19 in Minnesota have been among residents of long-term care facilities. We know the most severe COVID-19 cases are concentrated in long-term care facilities; in fact, right now, there are some long-term care facilities that are treating *more* COVID-19 patients than hospitals. Caregivers continue to do a great job under the stressful, chaotic circumstances, but they are scared for their safety and for the residents they love – and they desperately need our support. If we do not take significant, immediate action to pivot our state's strategy to a greater emphasis on long-term care settings, it is my belief that we will be confronted with a massive crisis in Minnesota.

We must look no further than the actions of other states to inform our own response. In New York, officials [expect](#) long-term care residents to account for approximately half of all COVID-19 fatalities, where many long-term care facilities did not receive adequate state assistance with personal protective equipment, testing, and staffing. In Florida, where residents of long-term care facilities account for only 30 percent of the state's total COVID-19 fatalities, the state government [acted](#) early to implement clear guidance for facilities and deployed the National Guard to assist with facility cleaning, staffing, and testing.

As such, I have worked extensively with representatives of long-term care facilities, health care professionals, facility residents, and concerned citizens to develop a series of proposals that we believe could be useful in responding to outbreaks in these settings. I respectfully request you consider the following action items:

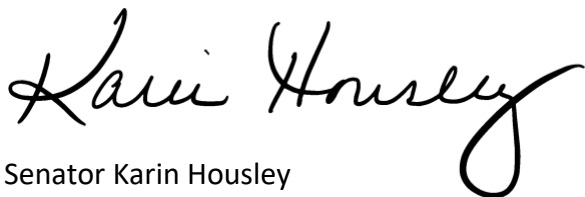
- Prioritize testing long-term care facility residents and staff utilizing both serological and antibody tests.
- Prioritize long-term care facilities for personal protective equipment (PPE) and other critical care supplies available through the State of Minnesota's stockpile, as well as make additional state educators available for deployment to facilities for infection control and PPE training.
- Strongly encourage furloughed health care workers to temporarily deploy to long-term care settings.
- Establish a student loan forgiveness program or other financial incentive for post-secondary students in advanced health care programs to temporarily work in long-term care settings.
- Enact a temporary state stipend to support staffing at long-term care facilities experiencing outbreaks.

- Temporarily ease certain state licensing and regulatory requirements for individuals with previous health care experience to work in long-term care settings.
- Deploy the Minnesota National Guard to assist with sanitizing and cleaning facilities, transporting patients, food preparation and delivery, laundry, and other duties at facilities experiencing outbreaks.
- Temporarily require oxygen (oximeter) checks on all residents and staff several times a day.
- Consider recent reports that ultraviolet light may be effective in reducing pathogens in the air and on surfaces, and the feasibility of implementing those practices in Minnesota's long-term care facilities.
- Immediately require all Department inspections of long-term care facilities be conducted in-person.
- Consider surging hospital beds dedicated for residents of long-term care facilities that test positive for COVID-19 instead of isolating the resident or moving the resident to another facility.
- Partner with the federal government to make hydroxychloroquine, remdesivir, and other experimental treatments available to all long-term care facilities with positive COVID-19 cases.

My colleagues and I stand ready to partner with you on solutions that require legislative action.

I respectfully request a response regarding each of these suggestions, as well as any alternative plans for which the Department is considering implementing, or has already implemented, to address this crisis. I look forward to a response from you or a member of your leadership team as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karin Housley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "y" at the end.

Senator Karin Housley
District 39

Chair, Senate Family Care & Aging Committee

Ms. Lisa Thimjon, interim legislative director, Minnesota Department of Health