



State of Connecticut

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October 7, 2020

Governor Ned Lamont
Office of the Governor
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Governor Lamont:

When it comes to protecting those most vulnerable to COVID-19 we need urgency. I remain incredibly disappointed in the lack of action from your administration, even as we have the final Mathematica report in hand that confirms everything advocates have been saying for months about how the state is failing its nursing home residents.

On September 8, 2020 I wrote to you (*letter attached*) asking multiple questions about what the state was doing to prepare for a second wave of COVID-19 in Connecticut long-term care facilities, including how Connecticut was preparing to address the devastating impact of isolation on the health and wellbeing of the elderly and what was being done to enhance protections in nursing homes and better support aging-in-place initiatives.

I received no response from your office.

While I am deeply disappointed in your failure to respond, I am even more outraged to hear comments from your Department of Public Health Commissioner suggesting the state "hesitate" in drawing conclusions from the findings of the Mathematica final report on the state's pandemic response in nursing homes. I asked you to take action to address the nursing home issues and suggested that if you did not lawmakers should. Commissioner Gifford's comments, representing your administration, send a clear message to majority Democrats that they too should wait and not act.

Democrat leaders followed your lead. They refused to add anything to the special session agenda addressing nursing home or aging-in-place issues. We've heard Democrat co-chairs say we are "out of time" to do anything now and must wait until next year to do anything legislatively. For months we have also heard you urge the state to wait to change policies until we received the final Mathematica report. Now we have that report, and your commissioner is telling people to wait for change, wait for more protections, wait for more support, wait for an end to the isolation that is causing seniors' health to deteriorate and making seniors more susceptible to disease and death.

The Mathematica report that we waited over three months for, following months of apparently little investigation, is an indictment on multiple policies that need to be changed. The report very clearly explains how nursing home residents saw a dramatic increase in depression, weight loss, pressure ulcers, and incontinence, and a decline in cognitive functioning. The report also highlights the connection between issues of wellbeing and isolation. As we all know, decreased capacity and other health issues can put individuals more at risk for death from any infection. Given their findings, Mathematica's very first recommendation, SR1, was that "LTC facilities and their state regulators must balance strict measures designed to limit the spread of the virus with the need to support the physical, emotional, and psychosocial needs of LTC residents."

Shockingly, Commissioner Gifford said she still does not want legislators or the public to jump to conclusions about what caused these declines. Her [direct quote](https://ctexaminer.com/2020/10/06/report-cautions-health-officials-to-balance-safety-from-covid-with-isolation-and-care-concerns-for-nursing-home-residents/): "I do want to hesitate that we draw direct lines from policy to these observations...I don't want to say we know for sure that it was caused by a visitation policy. It could be from changes in staffing or PPE wearing or many other factors." (<https://ctexaminer.com/2020/10/06/report-cautions-health-officials-to-balance-safety-from-covid-with-isolation-and-care-concerns-for-nursing-home-residents/>).

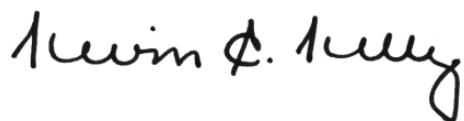
It is inexcusable at this point to not have answers or a plan to move forward. Seniors in our nursing homes don't have time on their side. Those caring for elderly loved ones are still facing the impossible choice of bringing their loved ones to hospitals when they are sick and giving up the ability to ever see their family member again; having a chilling effect on seniors' access to health care, most of whom are poor and women.

Connecticut has succeeded in keeping the infection rate down in our general population compared to other states. We must recognize that, but we cannot ignore that Connecticut failed our nursing home residents when compared to other states. Not only does our state still have more deaths per capita than the national average (approximately double); but out of all the COVID-related deaths in Connecticut 74% of the deaths occurred in nursing home residents, nearly double the 40% national average. The numbers are stark, but even more jarring are the countless stories from families about the decline of their loved ones when kept locked away in facilities that have long suffered from low Medicaid-reimbursement rates, improper PPE provided by the state, and a lack of focus by the state on the true epicenter of disease and death at the height of the pandemic.

Time has run out for far too many seniors already. Hesitation has led to devastation. I again ask for responses to the questions I submitted last month and most importantly, a clear plan to better protect and support the elderly moving forward.

Please find my September letter attached.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin D. Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kevin Kelly, State Senator (R-21)