



The Beacon

A Newsletter for Long-Term Care Residents

Sept/Oct 2020

VOTING



Get ready to vote! Ballots for the November 3rd general election were mailed by October 5th to every registered New Jersey voter. If you are not sure you are registered, you can check this information on the NJ Division of Elections 2020 Voter Information Portal at www.nj.gov/state/elections. To register, you can print the form for your county and mail it by October 13th. If you do not automatically receive a ballot, you can request it by mail through October 23rd.

If you need help registering to vote or filling out your mail-in ballot, you can ask anyone, including a staff member, family, or friend to help you. Family or friends can help you during approved visits. Anyone who helps you complete your ballot must fill out and sign the “assistor” box on the front of the inside envelope. Carefully read and follow the instructions on the ballot to sign, seal, and mail it properly. **The simplest way to return your ballot is through your long-term care community’s regular outgoing mail system.**

Your long-term care community should not test residents to judge if they are “capable” of voting. Only people who have been specifically stripped of their right to vote by a judge are considered legally incapable of voting. The fact that a person has dementia does not in itself take away their right to vote. If a person can express a clear choice, they can vote.

If you want to vote in person at a polling station, talk to your facility about how they will handle this. However, please know that most voters will vote on a provisional paper ballot at the polling place. Only people who are physically unable to fill out the provisional ballot will be allowed to vote on a machine. **Although the LTCO will advocate for your right to vote in person, we are advising that the safest and most efficient way to vote this year is by mail.**

For more detailed voting information, the LTCO created a longer guide called *Voting Information for Residents and Long Term Care Facilities* that you can access at www.nj.gov/litco or ask a staff member to print for you.

FACE for Seniors is a Facebook-based family and caregiver advocacy group that advocates a restoration of safe, controlled family visits. More broadly, FACE for Seniors members are focused on the safety and quality of life for residents of long-term care communities.



STAFFING

The NJ legislature recently passed bills (A4652 & S2712) to require direct care staffing ratios for nursing homes. The bills, passed by the Senate and Assembly on September 24th, will require 1 Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) for every 8 residents during the day, 1 to 10 residents in the evening, and 1 to 14 overnight. This is a substantial improvement over the current requirements and ratios that we routinely see in facilities. The LTCO

knows very well that most of the issues that arise in nursing homes are due to the simple fact that there are not enough staff to provide for residents' needs. Governor Murphy has indicated his support for this staffing legislation. If the bill is signed by the Governor, it will take effect in four months after enacted.



Moving Residents to Cohort COVID Patients (Federal Waivers Still in place)



Due to the COVID-19 health emergency, the federal government is allowing long-term care facilities to move residents from one section of a facility to another, or to another facility entirely, so that residents can be separated into COVID-positive, COVID-questionable or COVID-negative groups. This is known as "cohorting." Under normal circumstances, you would receive 30-days notice of such a move and you would have the

right to appeal. However, the federal government is not currently requiring that type of notification. Although this right to notice and appeal is suspended if the facility needs to cohort residents, it is not suspended for other reasons, such as the facility seeking to discharge you for non-payment. You can always contact the LTCO if you are being moved against your will, for COVID cohorting or for any other reason.



The purpose of this newsletter is to keep you up-to-date with important information. If you have a topic you want us to cover in a future issue, please call us or email us at outreach@ltco.nj.gov with your idea.

New Jersey Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman
www.NJ.GOV/LTCO Laurie Brewer, LTC Ombudsman

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