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MORE THAN 500 CAREGIVERS RALLY TO FIGHT FOR NECESSARY FUNDING FOR NURSING HOME RESIDENTS

Participants deliver more than 310 petitions with 31,000-plus signatures urging elected state officials to adequately fund medical assistance for poorest elderly and disabled.

HARRISBURG (June 3, 2008) – Led by the Pennsylvanians for Quality Care (PFQC) coalition, more than 500 nursing home caregivers, along with facility residents and their families, rallied at the state capitol today to call on the Rendell administration and General Assembly to increase funding in the 2008-09 state budget for the care of medical assistance nursing home residents.

PFQC unveiled more than 310 proclamations, signed by over 31,000 caregivers, residents and family members, urging elected officials to reject the governor's proposed budget, which includes no increase for the care of nursing home residents. Nursing home employees and families of residents talked about how chronic government under-funding is threatening the ability of nursing homes to continue to provide quality care and quality of life for the commonwealth's most frail elderly and disabled.

"It was a difficult, yet necessary, decision to place my husband in long-term care," said Jo-Ann Paul of Camp Hill, Cumberland County. Her husband, Bill, is a resident at ManorCare in Camp Hill.

"However, when health problems arise and there is no other viable alternative, it is comforting to know there are places where the residents are treated with kindness and respect," Paul said. "People are living longer today, and it is not always possible to keep a loved one at home. Therefore, the need for nursing homes and the vital funding that is necessary to provide quality care are of great concern to everyone."

Catherine Bitner, whose husband resides at Green Ridge Village in Newville, Cumberland County, said, "I'm here to let the Governor and members of the legislature know that the flat funding for senior care providers in this year's budget will have terrible consequences for the dedicated, caring staff at Green Ridge Village and the residents they serve."

"Without the staff at Green Ridge, I would never be able to meet my husband's care needs," she said.

Kim Cobaugh, the administrator at The Communities at Indian Haven, a county-owned nursing home in Indiana County, said costs at her facility increased 10 percent in 2007, largely due to rising expenses including staff salaries, food, utilities and medical supplies.

“It has also been necessary to increase the number of caregivers and nurses due to the fact that residents admitted from our local hospital are sicker than ever before,” Cobaugh said. “Fifty seven of our 99 residents have to be fed by staff. They require total bathing and grooming assistance, are incontinent, and also need help from two staff members and a mechanical lift every time they want to move. We have all available personnel, including our management staff, assisting at meal times.”

“The Administration’s proposal of a zero percent budget increase this year is unjust and will not allow us to continue to provide the necessary services to our vulnerable, care dependent population,” she said.

Two out of three nursing home residents in Pennsylvania are on medical assistance, and because government has not fulfilled its obligation to pay for their care, these facilities lose on average \$12 per resident per day. That means that nursing homes lose an average of more than \$4,300 per year on two-thirds of their residents.

Over the past three years, the commonwealth has underfunded nursing homes by nearly \$290 million, and many nursing homes in Pennsylvania are nearing a breaking point. Facilities are struggling to meet the medical, physical and social needs of residents. In some places in Pennsylvania, low-income elderly have to wait for nursing home beds because nursing homes cannot afford to take them, and self-paying nursing home residents have to pay more for their care – and spend down hard-earned assets faster than they would otherwise -- to compensate for government underfunding of medical assistance residents.

PFQC is calling on the Governor and legislators to fund core government functions before creating or expanding new programs.

The rally is the latest event in a continuing statewide campaign by PFQC to inform the public about an issue that affects the “Greatest Generation” of Pennsylvanians. PFQC kicked off its statewide information campaign in February. To date, media outlets all across the state have published editorials in support of PFQC and its call for fair funding. News clips and the latest information are available at: www.PaForQualityCare.org.

PFQC was formed by care providers, residents and family members to fight the administration’s proposed 2008-09 state budget. The coalition is comprised of care administrators; employees; residents and family members, as well as PANPHA, an association of nonprofit senior services; the PA Association of County Affiliated Homes (PACAH); and the PA Health Care Association (PHCA).

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