

Good afternoon Chair and members,

My name is Zahnia Harut and I am the Director of Nursing at Affinity Residential Care Llc- a residential assisted living provider with 4 locations in the twin cities.

In early 2020 one of our staff members fell sick with a mysterious respiratory condition. Shortly after, the residents in our home with the most complex medical conditions became severely ill. We all feared the worst. We all were hearing in the news about how so many people were dying of COVID.

Due to staff shortages myself and another nurse transported the residents to a nearby hospital and received the worst news ever. All but one resident was tested positive for COVID. I could say that almost all of our staff left. The texts started flooding in "I'm so sorry Nia I love these residents and I love working for you all but I have to protect my family and myself." Many of our frontline staff are also caregivers of elderly parents or immunocompromised family members. I understood wholeheartedly and took no offense to those who could not risk it.

As healthcare workers we have indents in our faces due to prolonged mask use that we know will go away after some time but unlike the indents, the losses we have experienced during this pandemic are everlasting. We manned technology to hold virtual birthdays, holidays, and sometimes goodbye. We did whatever we could to keep things together for our residents.

My 7 year old daughter has an underlying heart condition and due to the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, I made the decision to send her to my parents home 2 hours away. The sacrifices we have made extend beyond ourselves. I couldn't hug her for almost 2 months. I know my story is not unique but I want to express how many of us have been ultimately pushed far past our physical and emotional limits. There was so much unknown. We were so scared. We're still scared as rising cases can bring us over the threshold and that things may get back to how bad it was. Even though I feel more confident now and more prepared because of what I have experienced, I don't want to go through it again.

Similarly to how we have adapted to breathing through masks for extended periods of time, our residents had to adapt to us being their closest family and supporters for an extended period of time. While we don't want to go back to those times, we're grateful for the support of our workforce.

I want to thank my fellow healthcare workers for being resilient when our residents needed us the most. Without providers like us, care for seniors and the disabled would have suffered immensely. We are the glue that kept the entire system together. I ask that you prioritize our workforce when considering bonus pay for frontline workers.