

AN OPEN LETTER TO GOVERNOR GINA RAIMONDO

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo, Governor
State House 82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Governor Raimondo,

At your July 1ST televised briefing on the Coronavirus epidemic you announced a new state initiative to reduce seniors' health risks from living in congregate settings, especially nursing homes. You mentioned two specific efforts: 1) creation of an information system to assist more seniors and their families to figure out how to receive long-term care at home wherever possible; and 2) building a better and more robust homecare provider workforce through improved wages and benefits, plus development of a "career ladder" for homecare workers.

We are very pleased that you have responded to a lesson learned from the pandemic---that many Rhode Island seniors residing in nursing homes could remain in the community with better options for homecare. We and other groups have been calling for decisive state action on this issue since 2005 when a Brown University study revealed tha 19% of our Medicaid-funded nursing home residents were "low care"—the second highest rate in the country. These were people who needed assistance with activities of daily living, but didn't have serious health conditions. It concluded that with a better system of community-based long-term care, a number of them didn't need to be in a nursing home.

For years many seniors and their families have shared with us their frustrations in seeking reliable information and advice about homecare options. Additionally, in recent years we have been hearing more and more from seniors receiving home care about high turnover among the workers providing their care. We believe that is directly connected with the low salaries and inadequate benefits for direct workers in the homecare field.

Governor, we urge you to embark on this effort with the same leadership, diligence, stamina, and transparency that you have brought successfully to our struggle against the Covid-19 virus pandemic. We ask you to assemble a team that will listen carefully to seniors and their families and will be accountable for results. We pledge to wage a vigorous campaign in the General Assembly for the investments that will be needed. We look forward to working with you on this vital matter affecting our state's seniors.

Respectfully Yours,
Bill Flynn, MSW
Executive Director, Senior Agenda Coalition of RI