

FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

201 WEST PARK AVENUE
TALLAHASSEE, FL 32301-7760

PHONE (850) 222-3803
FAX (850) 205-6849
WWW.FLACCB.ORG

MICHAEL B. SHEEDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



June 24, 2020

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Office of the Governor
The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL
VIA EMAIL: GovernorRon.Desantis@eog.myflorida.com

RE: Support for Nursing Home Budget Appropriations 225 and 226

Governor DeSantis:

The Legislature included an increase for nursing centers' inflationary costs in HB 5001 to ensure Florida's frail elders continue receiving the high-quality, long term care they expect and need. Nursing centers currently operate with 2016 reimbursement rates, losing on average over \$27 per day to care for each Medicaid patient. The lack of inflationary increase over the past four years has made it extremely difficult for nursing centers to maintain qualified staff while meeting the demands of an older population with increasingly complex care needs.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Florida's nursing centers makes the need for this funding even greater. The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops asks that you sign a budget that retains the needed Medicaid rate increase for nursing center care. **The funds allocated to specific appropriations 225 and 226 are necessary to meet existing funding needs and the added challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated nursing centers' financial challenges:

- Facilities have increased costs for personal protective equipment (PPE), additional infection control supplies, as well as dietary and housekeeping costs needed to keep residents and staff as safe as possible.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is resulting in increased staffing costs for nursing centers. As regular workers find themselves unable to work due to exposure, facilities contract with staffing agencies to meet resident care needs at more than double the average employee wage. Many centers have been forced to increase caregiver wages to maintain employees, including hazard pay.
- Facilities will continue to incur COVID-19 costs, even after this pandemic stabilizes for the rest of the population. While Florida's curve for hospital admissions has plateaued, Florida nursing centers continue to see increases in the number of residents and staff testing positive for COVID-19 due to asymptomatic transmission. Nursing centers will be expected to monitor and care for residents with COVID-19 for many months to come.

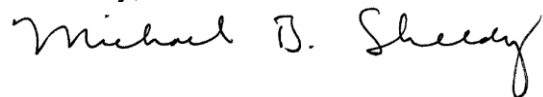
- Additional screening and monitoring, labor intensive workflow changes, and additional infection prevention practices have increased costs.

Almost 46,000 of Florida's most vulnerable citizens reside in skilled nursing facilities. While federal CARES Act funding has helped offset a portion of pandemic related costs, those dollars are not meeting the exponential costs of essential PPE and other services.

We ask that you sign a budget that retains the needed Medicaid rate increase for nursing center care. Those funds will support providers as they work to help flatten the curve of this virus and protect our state's seniors. At the same time, this funding will help ensure Florida seniors have access to a viable long-term care system that delivers the quality nursing center care they have come to expect and deserve.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael B. Sheedy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael B. Sheedy

cc: Most Rev. Enrique Delgado, Auxiliary Bishop of Miami & Health Moderator
Chris Spencer, Office of Policy and Budget
Ken Kniepmann, M. Ed., Associate for Health