

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Dignity Alliance Massachusetts Coalition of Disability and Senior Advocacy Organizations Forms in Response to Nursing Home Deaths**

Everyone deserves to live a full life with dignity. However, Covid-19 has robbed many of that right --- in just over five months more than 5,600 people have died in 379 Massachusetts nursing homes, 88% of the 429 homes in the state, and the toll increases daily. These deaths comprise 15% of all nursing home residents in the state and nearly 66% of all Covid-19 deaths in the Commonwealth. Over 24,000 nursing home residents and staff have tested positive. The mortality rate of infected nursing home residents is more than 22%, three times the rate of the general population

**Dignity Alliance Massachusetts has formed to address the structural and systemic deficiencies which have created this public health crisis. We are committed to implementing and expanding access to essential care improvements and living alternatives that will make the Commonwealth a model of care and living choices.**

There can no longer be any doubt about the urgency of the need for comprehensive change to the nursing home model as the predominant institution for long-term care of seniors and people with disabilities. Not only is a fundamental restructuring of facility operations necessary, but as a coalition of advocates with first-hand experience, we are here to say it can be done. New public policies are urgently required to promote community-based services while improving the conditions inside existing facilities. These places remain far too vulnerable at a time when the threat of a Covid-19 resurgence remains high.

In response, Dignity Alliance Massachusetts has organized as a broad-based group representing a wide range of stakeholders, including nursing home resident

advocates, disability rights organizations, legal service entities, mental health organizations, health policy experts, faith-based groups, and labor organizations, and those representing the voices of older adults and individuals with disabilities. Our aim is to advance policies that revolutionize long-term care, putting the dignity of individuals first, ensuring affordable options for community living, and providing living wages and benefits for caregivers and service workers in facilities and home and community-based settings.

“A comprehensive effort is needed to promote the dignity of all people in the Commonwealth, especially older adults and those with disabilities. Dignity Alliance seeks to ensure the highest possible quality of care and quality of life for all. The eagerness of so many groups to come together this quickly tells us that the time for change is now,” said Arlene Germain, a co-founder of Dignity Alliance Massachusetts and Policy Director of Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform.

Richard T. Moore, former Massachusetts Senate Health Care Chair, noted, “Dignity Alliance Massachusetts will pursue changes through legislation, regulation, and operating policies and practices, as well as advancing home and community-based long-term services and affordable, accessible housing options.”

“Nursing home residents all have disabilities and straddle all ages,” said Bill Henning, Executive Director of the Boston Center for Independent Living, “Our goals are to ensure maximum health and dignity in fully integrated and coordinated settings, and to support workers who provide services and care.”

“The nature and function of nursing homes has remained essentially unchanged for the past half century,” said former Secretary of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs, Paul Lanzikos. “Virtually every segment of our society has advanced to try to serve the individualized needs of people with modernized concepts, policies, and practices. It is well past time for nursing homes to meet the needs and expectations of adults and persons with disabilities.”

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts participants include these organizations and individuals:

### **Organizations**

- AARP Massachusetts

- Ad Lib Center for Independent Living
- Alzheimer's Association Massachusetts / New Hampshire
- Boston Center for Independent Living
- Cape Organization for the Rights of the Disabled
- Center for Living and Working
- Center for Public Representation – Massachusetts
- COP Amputee Association
- Disability Law Center
- Disability Policy Consortium
- Disability Resource Center
- Greater Boston Legal Services
- Greater Boston Chapter of the United Spinal Association
- Honoring Choices Massachusetts
- Hospice & Palliative Care Foundation of Massachusetts
- Independence Associates
- Institute for Human Centered Design
- Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform
- Massachusetts Aging and Mental Health Coalition
- Massachusetts Coalition for Serious Illness Care
- Massachusetts Guardianship Policy Institute
- Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
- Massachusetts Senior Action Council
- MassNAELA (National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys)
- MetroWest Center for Independent Living
- Mystic Valley Elder Services
- Northeast Independent Living Program
- Public Partnerships
- SeniorCare
- Somerville Cambridge Elder Services
- Southeast Center for Independent Living
- Stavros Center for Independent Living

### **Individuals**

- John J. Ford, Esq.
- Lachlan Forrow, MD

- Alex Green
- Former Attorney General L. Scott Harshbarger
- Chris Hoeh
- Former Secretary of Elder Affairs Paul J. Lanzikos
- James A. Lomastro, PhD
- Sheila L. Molony, PhD, APRN, GNP-BC
- Former Massachusetts Senate Health Care Chair Richard T. Moore
- Charlene Neu
- Sandy Alissa Novack
- David f. Polakoff, MD, MSc
- Penelope Ann Shaw, PhD. Aging and Disability Advocate
- Carol Steinberg, Esq.

Organizations and individuals interested in learning more about Dignity Alliance Massachusetts or becoming involved are invited to send an email to

[info@DignityAllianceMA.org](mailto:info@DignityAllianceMA.org).

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