

David Vinkler



Testimony for Nursing Home Task Force

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We appreciate this opportunity to provide our comments to this task force. My name is David Vinkler and I am here representing AARP. Several years ago, AARP worked with the Attorney General on legislation that gave nursing facilities the tools to screen residents with criminal or violent backgrounds. In spite of this, several nursing homes continue to admit violent individuals into their facilities.

This issue is further complicated by reductions to mental health services which force people into inappropriate settings, like nursing homes, that cannot meet their needs; and cuts that have significantly reduced the number of state surveyors and the Ombudsman Program.

AARP suggests several steps to address this appalling issue.

- First – The typical nursing home is not equipped to handle ex-offenders and people with violent behavior. These individuals need specialized services and staff trained to respond to their specific needs. Nursing Homes should not be the housing of last resort for people that could pose a threat to other residents.
- Second - The state needs to be able to impose appropriate fines for serious violations. Recently courts ruled that the Department of Public Health did not have the authority to fine facilities over \$10,000. Penalties need to be meaningful to prompt real change.
- Third - money collected from fines should be used to supplement other state funds and help fully staff nursing home surveyors and the ombudsman program. AARP is looking for a minimum of 75 additional surveyors and one ombudsman for every 2,000 residents in Illinois.
- Fourth - We need legislation to close the loops in the screening process and risk assessments. For instance, background checks should go beyond Illinois; and the state should exercise a much tighter oversight on how facilities are performing risk assessments.
- Fifth - The state needs to stop cuts to home and community based services. Home and community based services are the preferred service option for older adults, people with disabilities, and those with mental illness. These services often can meet the unique care needs of the people they serve. Individuals that choose nursing home placement should be assured that they will receive high quality of care and be safe from abuse from inappropriately housed residents.

We look forward to continuing to work with this task force and our elected leaders to improve the long term care system in Illinois and make meaningful changes in the lives of those it serves.