

New York State Legislative Hearing
February 05, 2026
Essential Care Visitor
Submitted by Marcella Goheen, Founder, Essential Care Visitor

Thank you to the New York State Legislature for the opportunity to be of service to the nursing home space, the affordable living option for the vulnerable and aging New Yorkers - on behalf of residents and families in New York State.

Essential Care Visitor is a platform, since the first day of Covid-19, whose mission is to be assistive with the vulnerable aging and disabled families and residents residing in their affordable home - a nursing home. We do this through advocacy, education and collaboration with the providers and partners on the frontlines in real time through five components of our innovative Family Essential Program.

While Essential is in its sixth year of its journey - I, as a consumer, am in my 10th year of serving my husband in a nursing home. Every piece of this program has been designed by the families we have served. To say it's an honor, is an understatement. To say that it remains my privilege - only reflects ½ of the joy I receive from being able to serve my husband, and through our program, the many other family members who might benefit from our inspired platform during this transformative time in history.

As you know, we have witnessed, through our lived experience, the most horrific of conditions of a nursing home during the humanitarian crisis in 2020 - when all of the New York family's caregivers needed the same thing at the same time - to get in. And, now - we have lived through what we call the Covid-19 hangover over the past five years. We continue to identify daily the missing links of this fragile, intricate invisible space that serves care to our most vulnerable. We are concerned about the care space - fraught with layers and layers of staffing barriers, intergenerational disconnect, PTSD from the Covid-19 - and now, we witness providers planning ways to cut costs based on the recent federal rescinded staffing minimum. So many dynamics that I testified in hearings two years ago - the impact of the trauma and PTSD of Covid-19 - are coming true.

The care partnership of the family on the frontline in real time - in order that our loved ones retain dignity and comfort is essential. While this informal dynamic is already supported by several parts of decades old public health laws - we have formalized a care infrastructure over the past 1.5 years, through our innovative FEP program that we wish to be present in every nursing home in New York state and that we propose in our bill to operate through the New York State Office of the Aging.

Through our Family Essential Program - over the past 16 months, we have served over 1035 families in three different counties through our peer-to-peer hybrid non-clinical model that serves as a safe, impactful haven of advocacy, education and collaboration to impact resident care. We work tirelessly to de-escalate and solve care concerns, through providing support to the family and resident during a most vulnerable juncture of one's life - changing their entire home environment, and living an entrenched bewilderment and isolation on what to do next as a caregiver when a loved one suddenly needs sub acute

care in a nursing home. It's traumatic for a family. Most families don't know what may be available to them, or their loved one - or how to get it. To navigate this transition amidst complex grief, and to put words to the language of the care system to effectively get what they need - is a complex task. And, as we all know - not one size fits all. Each human is unique to their own needs. We are there for them. The community of effective advocacy that the Family Essential Program nourishes is an unfilled space, unmet need, and part of the solution to solving the nursing home dilemma. And, it's a win for the Provider. We de-escalate.

As we remain committed to scale up our FEP throughout New York State, we are asking the New York State Legislature to pass our Assembly Bill 9412 in the Assembly, and Senate Bill 8888 in the State - which amends the Elder Law to establish this innovative program model to serve our 100,000 vulnerable. The fiscal ask of this FEP is a mere \$500,000 and reflects .000002 of the 2026-2027 260 billion dollar budget. Scaled up - we figure it is \$16.00-\$18.00 per family over a 72 hour period. It's a small price-tag with a huge impact: dignity for the NY vulnerable whose affordable home is a nursing home.

An age-friendly New York must extend into the walls of nursing homes. Nursing home residents, an invisible population - must not be forgotten. Our FEP contributes to an age-friendly New York, and disabled and aging New Yorkers like my husband who need a nursing home need the community support to break the barrier of isolation and invisibility for our New York aging and disabled to serve dignity and humanity.

Finally, the only way nursing home space will ever change and transform - is if we talk about them and design them differently. A nursing home should not be a dreaded place to go, not a mini-storage for humans with a money grab - but, a true phase in a vulnerable loved one's journey. If we don't present care infrastructures within nursing homes as a dignified option - how can an owner be obligated to serve dignity? If we curse them - they will stay cursed. If we marginalize them as the last ditch option for care - the pervasive lingering negligence, failure to thrive and contribution to decline of a human will persist. However, if we celebrate them through creating better quality measures - through innovation, transformative programs, community based and collaborative accountability, recruiting, training, healing the space - nursing homes can be better. I have hope through our Family Essential Program.

###