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Media Release

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts' Comments in Response to Governor Healey's Statement on Safety in Assisted Living Residences

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts (DignityMA) appreciates that Governor Maura Healey is requiring all 273 assisted living residences (ALR) in the Commonwealth to provide assurance that their ability to prevent and respond to emergencies such as a fire are current and up to regulatory requirements. By July 25, each provider must inform each resident and family member by letter about "fire safety protocols, evacuation procedures, and key points of contact for questions or concerns."

Additionally, within 30 days, each provider must provide assurance of compliance with all fire safety requirements. A site-specific Disaster and Emergency Plan must be submitted to the Executive Office of Aging and Independence (AGE), the state agency charged with overseeing and regulating ALRs.

On behalf of current and prospective ALR residents, their families, and staff members, DignityMA is advocating that the following are taken into consideration during the assurance process:

- In addition to communications to current residents and families, all information is posted on the ALR's website. This is important for prospective residents and staff members' knowledge as well as for advocates and the general public.
- All staff in all departments and all shifts are fully trained in prevention and emergency response procedures with 30 days.
- At least one fire drill per shift has occurred within the past 90 days.
- Conduct an assessment of each resident to determine their ability to "self-evacuate". Identify the type of assistance likely needed for each resident unable to self-evacuate. Make this information available to staff and first-responding agencies.
- As part of the "compliance assessment regarding fire safety requirements", determine if smoke barriers exist extending from the floor slab to the underside of the floor or ceiling above, or through a suspended ceiling to the slab above. Also, determine if bedroom and other occupancy rooms have self-closing doors when a fire alarm occurs.

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Beyond these life safety aspects, DignityMA continues to advocate for:

- Transparency in ownership information. The names of owners (in addition to the Administrator) and full contact information should be readily available on the ALR's website and posted publicly on the property as well as posted on AGE's website.
- Copies of the results of all re-certification surveys are posted on the ALR and AGE's websites and made available to residents and families.
- The work of the Massachusetts Assisted Living Residences (ALR) Commission continues until information stemming from the Gabriel House fire to be properly considered and there is opportunity for public input prior to the finalization of recommendations.
- A comprehensive analysis is needed regarding the provision of "affordable assisted options" that are readily available, safe, and offer comprehensive services equivalent to other ALRs.

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts is a state-wide voluntary coalition of aging and disability advocates and organizations dedicated to the systematic transformation of long-term services, facilities, and care to ensure the dignity and well-being of older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers. We are committed to advancing new ways of providing long-term services, supports, living options, and care while respecting choice and self-determination. DignityMA works through education, legislation, regulatory reform, and legal strategies to realize this vision throughout the Commonwealth.

www.DignityAllianceMA.org