

# U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY

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CHAIRMAN Special Committee on Aging

## **Chairman Bob Casey's Opening Statement "Residents at Risk: The Strained Nursing Home Inspection System and the Need to Improve Oversight, Transparency, and Accountability"**

Good morning, everybody. The Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order. Today, the Special Committee on Aging will examine troubling shortfalls and that an understatement in the Nation's nursing home inspection system and receive testimony about the urgent need to invest in oversight to protect residents' health and safety.

Last year, I directed my staff on the committee to investigate the capacity of state inspection agencies to enforce health and safety standards in the Nation's 15,000 federally certified nursing homes. Today, I am releasing the findings of that investigation in a report, I will hold it up just for illustrative purposes entitled "Uninspected and Neglected," based on 2,000 pages of documents and data provided by every state in the Nation. The report paints a picture of a system in crisis. Underfunded and understaffed state agencies have fallen behind on basic duties that they are charged with executing for example like conducting annual nursing home inspections and responding to resident complaints in a timely manner as nursing homes residents and their families should have a right to expect.

As we will hear from our witnesses, the result is that nursing home residents are being put at risk because of this problem. Just imagine the horror of an 84-year-old woman whose leg was broken at a nursing home in Pennsylvania, but a full week passed before she was taken to a hospital where she later died. The county coroner cited negligence as a contributing factor in this woman's preventable death that occurred one day before her 85th birthday. Often such stories aren't the subject of public attention. due to inadequate oversight.

Federal data shows that one out of nine, one out of every nine nursing homes in the Nation has not received a comprehensive annual inspection in two years. Infrequent annual inspections have led more residents and families to file complaints, which states are failing to investigate quickly. Time is of the essence when state inspectors need evidence to prove serious deficiencies like physical abuse, sexual assault, or inadequate medical care in circumstances like we all read about. My fear is that the trail is going cold for too many residents before nursing home inspectors can arrive on the scene.

The findings of this investigation should serve as wakeup call to Congress, both the House and the Senate. The investigation found that 32 state survey agencies have vacancy rates of 20 percent or more, 20 percent of more among nursing home inspectors, and nine of those agencies have vacancy rates of 50 percent or higher. States directly linked staffing shortages to inspection delays and said flat-lined federal funding over the last decade is making these problems worse. Simply put, federal dollars are not keeping up with growing workloads and the need for states to offer comprehensive, I am sorry the need to offer competitive salaries to attract workers.

Today, the federal government is spending tens of billions of dollars on nursing homes, but Congress appropriates less than 80 cents per resident per day to nursing home oversight—not even enough to buy a cup of coffee. For too long, Congress has failed to invest in strategies to protect the health and safety of the Nation’s 1.1 million nursing home residents.

If we as Americans claim that ours is the greatest country in the world, we must insist upon and invest in and ensure that we have the best long term care system in the world. That should be our goal and we are not fulfilling that goal right now. Now I turn to Ranking Member Braun for his opening statement.