

# Hearing airs charges of nursing home mistreatment

A litany of complaints about nursing home abuses were placed before a public hearing conducted by a House Democratic Task Force meeting last night at Farmington Hills City Hall.

Task force member Kwame Kilpatrick, D-Detroit, conducted the hearing, joined by Nancy Quarles, D-Southfield, and Andrew Raczkowski, R-Farmington Hills.

The audience, which filled the city council chambers, backed up their complaints with photographs showing sores, bruises and other evidence of neglect.

Doris Austenberry said that her mother suffered a broken hip and gangrene in her leg which sent her to the hospital. A few days later, she died. She blamed the lobbying of the nursing home

industry and their contributions to elected officials for the failure to bring about improvements. Her sister is now facing similar neglect.

Kilpatrick said he watched his own grandmother and great-grandmother die miserably in nursing homes.

"My mother, a U.S. congresswoman, couldn't get adequate care for her mother," Kilpatrick added.

Phyllis Moga said she tried to complain about how her mother was being mistreated but could get no response from the state of Michigan for three months. She said the nursing home industry has enough money but refuses to put it into staffing.

"Blatant corporate greed needs to be stopped," she said. "Owners of nursing homes should be

made to live in the homes."

O.C. Stevens called for improvements in staffing levels. Monica Jackson said her husband was constantly abused during the last seven years in two homes, including being drugged, starved and not toileted regularly. Virginia Brown worked in a nursing home where a new administrator didn't want the staff to interact with residents.

That led to the resignation of 17 nursing care professionals.

Shirley Clark said her father had to be taken to the hospital because the nursing home he was in failed to change his dressing every day. Instead, he went four days without a dressing change, she told the panel. Ellen Ann Fox said she was fired by a nursing home because she refused to falsify records. She said the placement process by hospitals and courts often involve conflicts of interest.

Ruth Fuller had a grandmoth-

er die of gangrene when the nursing home staff wouldn't change her dressings. She said staff reported that insurance companies, not the professionals, are determining what treatment is given.

"I found seniors not being fed, not being dressed, not being cared for," she said, adding that pay scales are too low. "We pay workers who take care of our parents and family members."

Nadine Mitcham, whose mother was in a home, said that the industry skims profits from the top and CEOs are paid millions, not leaving enough money for adequate care. Joan Barber asked why nursing homes aren't held to the same standards of care as are acute care hospitals.

Grover Watkins said his mother has lived in several homes and he's ready to move her again due to lack of adequate care.

"The nursing home did not properly use medication prescribed by doctors," Watkins said.

Dennis Cavanagh said more laws are needed "but we need enforcement of present laws."

Mike Connor, spokesman for Quality Care in Nursing Homes, called for the consumer to be represented in discussions about legislation dealing with nursing homes.

"The industry has been dominating the issue," he said, charging the industry is blocking improvements in the inspection process. "We should listen more to relatives of patients about neglect."

He said claims that homes don't have adequate funding are false. He noted that state funding increased from \$400 million to \$1.2 billion in recent years. He called for improved doctor care in nursing homes and more attention to safety issues such as dangerous bad falls. He was joined by Lydia Rizzo of the Campaign for Quality Care, who called for relatives of nursing home patients to organize to win improvements. She said the group has been able to make some progress because of its strength of numbers. She criticized the state enforcement

agency, the Department of Consumer and Industry Services, as being too lax. "We need more than sympathy," she said. "We need action."

J.G. Coulter said his mother was moved to a hospital twice without any clothes on.

"She was dropped from the bed and stabbed in her feet," he added.

P. Sanchez, a nursing home worker, agreed with the statements made by others.

"At dinnertime, I have seen a lot of people just sitting there without food in front of them," she added. "Nurses are overwhelmed, too."

The hearing was arranged by former Farmington Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi who told the audience that the influence of special interest contributions to candidates for office, in this case the nursing home industry, is a big factor in there being no progress in making the necessary improvements. He called on candidates not to accept special interest political action committee (PAC) contributions.

Kilpatrick and Quarles said the turnout was the best the task force has seen since it began holding the hearings.

Call Michigan Campaign for Quality Care at 800-288-6923.

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