

MAY 9, 2002

**CONGRESSIONAL DEMOCRATS AND ADVOCATES PUT FORWARD PLAN TO ENSURE PROPER CARE FOR SENIORS IN NURSING HOMES**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today joined her Democratic colleagues to announce a major legislative initiative to help guarantee that seniors in [nursing homes](#) receive proper and appropriate care.□□

The legislation, [the Nursing Home Staffing Improvement Act of 2002](#) , would strengthen federal standards by mandating HHS-identified staffing ratios in all nursing homes receiving Medicare or Medicaid funding.□ The bill would require that all nursing home residents receive between 4.1 and 4.85 hours of nursing care each day.□ Ninety-five percent of the nation's 17,000 nursing homes receive funds from Medicaid and Medicare.□

Schakowsky and U.S. Representatives Brad Carson (D-OK) and Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) were joined at a Capitol Hill news conference by individuals whose family members endured poor care, advocates for nursing home reform and healthcare professionals.□ The members of Congress were presented petitions signed by more than 100,000 people demanding action.

The Bush Administration recently released a [report](#) which found that 9 out of 10 nursing homes lack adequate staff, which often results in substandard care that can lead to bedsores, malnutrition, weight loss, dehydration, pneumonia and serious blood-borne infections.

Below is Schakowsky's statement during today's news conference.

*"I want to thank all of you for your leadership and your commitment to the seniors in nursing homes throughout our country.□ For years, you have been the frontline activists for true and meaningful nursing home reforms that have provided a measure of dignity and quality care for the elderly and peace of mind for their families.□□*

*"You've organized the grassroots, you've talked to your neighbors, and you've knocked on doors.□ And people throughout the country agree with you - better care for the 1.9 million nursing homes residents is needed, now. We are proud to receive this petition signed by more than 100,000 concerned citizens demanding that Congress act, and act now, to protect the health and safety of their loved ones.*

*"We have won important victories, like the ombudsman programs and important rights for resident that are now part of the law, but I believe our biggest challenge lies ahead.□ The elderly are receiving inferior care because nursing homes are understaffed - many qualified and skilled professionals are simply overwhelmed.□ They are unable to provide*

*the level of treatment necessary because they are overworked and have too many residents under their care.*

*"We all agree that the surest way to dramatically reduce substandard care is to increase the number of qualified and properly trained staff. Now, even the Bush Administration can't argue against that logic. Their own study for the Department of Health and Human Services found that 90% of nursing homes are understaffed and this shortage is directly linked to inferior and substandard care.*

*"Quality and quantity go hand in hand. The quality of care is greatly improved if the quantity of qualified professionals is increased. Unfortunately, in many tragic cases, the opposite is also true. That is why, under the leadership of Representative Henry Waxman, we are announcing common sense legislation that will help ensure that our parents and grandparents spend their golden years in dignity. The bill, the Nursing Home Staffing Improvement Act of 2002, would require that nursing homes meet federal staffing standards, while increasing federal Medicaid payments to states to help them meet that goal. We will be introducing the bill next week.*

*"By requiring minimum staffing ratios at nursing homes, we are saying more is less - less dehydration, less malnutrition, and fewer bedsores. And more qualified healthcare professionals would mean that senior citizens in nursing homes are less likely to suffer accidents.*

*"Unless Congress acts, the problems that exist today will only get worse because the population is aging. By 2030, almost 8.9 million Americans will be 85 years of age or older, that is more than double the number today. I look forward to working with you and my colleagues to pass this critical legislation."*