



Testimony of Catherine Taylor, AARP Rhode Island
In support of House Bill 7493
House Finance Committee
April 30, 2024

Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with 38 million members nationwide and nearly 128,000 members here in Rhode Island. We advocate on behalf of issues that impact older adults, and we appreciate the opportunity to offer our support increasing the daily rate of payments to nursing facilities by twenty percent (20%) for single occupancy rooms to include private bathrooms, as House Bill 7493 from Chairman Abney is intended to do.

Rhode Island should move toward a single-room occupancy model in nursing homes, assisted living residences, and other licensed residential care facilities to help stem the spread of infectious disease and promote privacy and dignity. Research has demonstrated that residents in both nursing homes and residential care settings strongly prefer private rooms and bathrooms. Private rooms improve the security of personal belongings and aids in infection control. There is research that demonstrates nursing homes that have incorporated 'culture change' such as the Green House model which includes private rooms for residents, among other core values, faced significantly lower rates of COVID-19 cases, hospital admissions and mortality than traditional nursing homes¹.

It is the position of AARP Rhode Island that providers with existing facilities that need renovation to create private baths, kitchenettes, and other improvements should have incentives for making such changes. All new or retrofitted nursing facilities and other settings should provide private living quarters, except when residents request to share rooms or apartments. States should ensure that any new facilities that are developed meet consumers' needs and preferences. Incentives should emphasize resident-centered care, a home-like environment, a positive workplace culture, and opportunities for resident involvement in the community.

Currently in Rhode Island, many nursing homes have double occupancy rooms with a privacy curtain separating the two individuals who live in a space of 160 square feet and share a bathroom. Often, two people in the next room also share the same bathroom, meaning four residents use the same toilet and sink. A shower room is usually located at the end of the hall for all residents on that floor. Research has demonstrated that residents in nursing homes prefer private rooms and bathrooms, and yet most residents in nursing facilities live in rooms shared with a stranger. AARP's mission is to empower people to choose how we live as we age – and I am confident that none of us would choose to share a bedroom with a stranger in our final years.

Furthermore, these undignified arrangements can lead to the tragic spread of infections, as we've seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the latest AARP COVID-19 Nursing Home Dashboard, since January of 2020, there have been a total of 13,802 recorded cases of COVID-19 in Rhode Island nursing

¹ (<https://www.mcknights.com/news/clinical-news/green-house-facilities-report-lower-covid-cases-deaths-even-among-outliers/>)

homes and as a result 1,279 nursing home residents have perished². We cannot move on from the pandemic without learning important lessons and making critical, permanent infection control measures – incentivizing and paying for private rooms and bathrooms chief among them -- to ensure that this tragedy is never repeated.

A twenty percent add-on to the Medicaid per diem rate for single occupancy rooms and private bathrooms in nursing homes is an important start to incentivizing nursing homes to make these important changes, and to ensuring that nursing homes that provide single-occupancy rooms can stay in business. AARP RI urges the committee to pass House Bill 7493.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Catherine Taylor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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² <https://www.aarp.org/ppi/issues/caregiving/info-2020/nursing-home-covid-states.html>