

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



CHAIRMAN Special Committee on Aging

Chairman Bob Casey's Opening Statement

“Assisted Living Facilities: Understanding Long-Term Care Options for Older Adults”

The Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order. As Chairman of the Aging Committee, my top priority is keeping our promises to older Americans and to Americans with disabilities. We owe it to every older adult, every person with a disability, and their families to have the necessary information to decide when, where, and how to receive care as they age. That has motivated my advocacy for example, for home and community-based services. Every American who wants to receive care at home should be able to do so, and the workers providing that care must be paid, in my judgement, a living wage.

It has similarly motivated my work to ensure that nursing homes are providing safe, quality care for all of their residents. We need to address the chronic underfunding and understaffing for the state agencies that conduct nursing home oversight – so they can effectively protect the health and safety of residents. And this core mission of the Aging Committee brings us to today's topic: the topic of assisted living and that landscape.

It's been 20 years since the Committee held a hearing on assisted living. With the dramatic growth of the assisted living industry in recent decades, it's long past time for Congress to reexamine this model and ensure it is meeting our Nation's needs. The best estimates reveal nearly a million Americans live in more than 30,000 assisted living facilities across our nation – and that is almost certainly an undercount of that number.

Assisted living facilities are state-regulated residences that support independent living while offering help with activities of daily living, like bathing and medication management. They also often provide meaningful engagement and activities for the residents. Assisted living was first envisioned as a social model for residents who needed lower levels of support. But today, people living in assisted living facilities are older, require more care, and have health care needs similar to that of those who reside in a nursing home.

As the needs of the assisted living population change. As those needs change, we need to know if assisted living facilities are meeting the needs of those residents or the needs of their families. One major issue which I hear a lot about is cost. Assisted living facilities are widely unaffordable to the average American and their family. A recent survey found that 80 percent of older adults would be unable to afford, unable to afford, four years in an assisted living facility.

The average annual cost is \$54,000 a year – but the costs can be substantially higher depending upon the location and the type of care a resident requires. The more assistance and care a resident need, the more they pay. And in some cases, residents and their families don't know their total costs until they receive their monthly bill. These substantial costs and hidden fees make it nearly impossible for older adults and their families to accurately budget for long-term care.

Now, that is one of the reasons, starting today, I'm asking Pennsylvanians and people across the country to share your stories and your bills with us. I want to hear from you about the true cost of assisted living and understand whether families have the information they need to make difficult financial and health care decisions.

Go to [Aging dot Senate dot gov slash assisted living bills](https://aging.senate.gov/assisted-living-bills), all one word, assisted living bills, to share your stories. I think it is very important that we hear from people, hear from people about their own experience as family members, as people who are paying the bill and also expecting the promises that are made when someone becomes a resident in an assisted living facility, It is only by hearing those stories, by only hearing about those experiences can be bring the needed change that we all agree has to come.

The assisted living industry is also facing the same workforce crisis that we see across other long-term care settings and even beyond long-term care, it is also true in context of childcare and so many other parts of our healthcare and care landscape. Workers are often struggling to support their own families because direct care workers are paid an average of just \$15 dollars an hour, nationwide.

Workers provide a higher level of care to support residents' growing needs, especially residents with dementia. But training requirements and worker support look very different in each state. As we will hear from our witnesses, these challenges make it harder for families to find the information that they need about assisted living facilities, including how much it will cost, the quality of services they will receive, and how safe their family member will be.

A recent Washington Post investigation found that since 2018, more than 2,000 people have left assisted-living facilities unsupervised and have been left unattended outside. Tragically, 98, Ninety-eight, of these incidents have resulted in the death of the resident, and those are just the cases that have been reported.

The findings of the Post investigation demonstrate how urgent it is that Congress better understand this industry. There has also been significant reporting by the New York Times and KFF, in a series written before the end of last year. To help in our understanding, I've sent letters to three of the largest corporate owners of American assisted living facilities.

The letters request information about costs, workforce, safety, and availability of information about quality and services in assisted living facilities. I hope these letters, I should say the response to the letters, will improve transparency in the assisted living industry and help to inform policy solutions to address some of these concerns.

As families are making difficult decisions about where to age, they deserve to know that their loved ones are safe. I think we can all agree on that. And assisted living providers making promises they can't keep is a violation of trust. As we continue to increase the quality of the continuum of long-term care for older adults, it is time we prioritize efforts to improve the assisted living option.

If we say as a Nation, the United States, the greatest country in the World then we have to be the best, not second, not third, the best long-term care in the World and we are not there yet. Older adults and people with disabilities who call assisted living facilities home. We have to remember that this is their home, their residence, where they live, where their families come to see them. If those older adults and people with disabilities are calling those facilities home, they should have quality, affordable care.

So, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today and I will turn to Ranking Member Braun for his opening statement.