



Letters to the Editor

Paul A. Gigot

Editor, Editorial Page

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I am writing in response to an article that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* on Saturday, April 10, with the headline, [Coronavirus Strikes at Least 2,100 Senior Facilities Across U.S., Killing 2,300 People](#). As we continue to navigate these uncertain, unprecedented times, everyone can unify behind the idea that our most vulnerable populations need our help.

However, the article makes a common though meaningful error by grouping together skilled nursing facilities (nursing homes) with the broader spectrum of senior living communities that support independent living, assisted living, and memory care. While senior living communities have experienced tragic losses in the past weeks, the new coronavirus risk profile for those living in senior living communities is far more optimistic. A study published by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention on April 3 notes that senior living communities may be in a better position to contain the spread of the disease because of their ability to have greater social distancing.

We have seen firsthand how senior living communities are doing everything they can to protect their residents. Similar to what was outlined in the April 10 article, our communities have made significant efforts to protect their residents, including restricting visitor access, stopping communal dining, adding enhanced infection control measures, and taking the temperatures of employees, among other controls, and closely following guidance from local and state health officials. Employees are also receiving initial and ongoing training to maintain their safety and the wellbeing of senior living residents.

With that said, public health officials have in no uncertain terms identified older adults as a population at higher risk of getting very sick from the coronavirus. This pandemic presents unique challenges to both the skilled nursing facilities and senior living communities, and we are asking our leaders for support.

To identify, contain and mitigate the effects of the coronavirus in our communities, we need priority access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and rapid and adequate testing to continue safe care for our residents in the coming months. We're concerned about running out of supplies – including facemasks, eye protection, gowns and gloves – that protect our workers who are on the front lines of this crisis bravely providing care to our residents.

As we push for greater access to testing and long-term access to safety equipment for employees, the senior living industry provides a significant opportunity to defend our seniors from COVID-19 resulting in less costs, financial and otherwise, to the greater health care system. That's why we need our federal, state and local lawmakers and health departments to take swift and effective



action to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents and staff living and working in senior living and make them a priority during this crisis.

Our communities are working day in and day out to care for and support the health and wellbeing of our seniors, and we're committed to continuing to advocate for the tests and PPE they need to keep doing so.

Respectfully,

James Balda
President & CEO
Argentum

David Schless
President
American Seniors Housing Association