Assisted Living Advisory Council (ALAC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, June 28th, 2022
10:00 AM
\*The meeting was held virtually via Zoom\*

ALAC members: Donna Bucca, EOHHS, Mary Jo Boynton, Kim Martone, Tyler Newhall, DHCD, Matt Salmon, and David Santos.
EOEA staff: Secretary Elizabeth Chen, Assistant Secretary Carole Malone, Matt Casey, Michelle Carter, Trisha Marchetti, and William A. Travascio.

1. Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM by Secretary Chen.
2. Welcome and Introductions:

Secretary Chen thanked members of the Council, stakeholders, and members of the public for attending.
3. Approval of the Minutes:

The minutes from the March 22nd, 2022 meeting were presented and approved by all those present.
4. EOEA Updates:

Secretary Chen noted that since the last meeting Nicole Breslin was appointed by the Governor’s Office to fill the 9th seat on the Council. She is currently the President and CEO of Youville House and Youville Place, a role she has held since November 2015. In addition, Nicole is currently the Board Chair of LeadingAge Massachusetts, which represents not-for-profit providers of health care, housing, and services for older adults in Massachusetts. LeadingAge Massachusetts’ members provide housing and services to more than 25,000 older adults each year in Massachusetts.

Secretary Chen then mentioned she recently spoke at the Mass-ALA Annual Regulations Training, where the focus of her remarks was on staffing. When the EOEA team drills down to why preventable harm happened to a resident, or why there was repeated and system-wide breakdown in non-compliance to regulations, we can almost always tie it to an organization that experiences high turnover, an organization with staff who do not exhibit genuine caring or joy in being with older people, and an organization that does not empower every level of staffing to be vigilant about resident safety, resident quality of life, and resident rights.

As leaders, there should be a focus on hiring individuals who really care about older adults. Employees should be treated as a whole person who have stressors outside of the workplace. Employers might be able to help alleviate employees’ stress and should share with them the knowledge that they have a good heart, and intention to do their best, and empower them to be the employer’s eyes and ears when they see something not quite right about a resident. If this happens, Sec. Chen is confident ALRs will naturally exceed the regulatory standards. The EOEA regulatory standards are a minimum set of standards to keep residents safe and to look after their quality of life.

She stressed that our work is sacred trust between human beings, not a series of tasks.

Patricia Marchetti, Director of Assisted Living Certification – EOEA, noted that the ALR team has been back out in the field since April. Currently the certification team is comprised of 6 individuals, and they are addressing the backlog. Advance notice of their arrival is being given to residences. She added that currently her team has one opening, it closed last Friday and interviews will be occurring over the next few weeks. EOEA will be sending out letters whenever a residence fails to: respond to survey requests, submit data as part of the annual aggregate data report, or file financial disclosures statements. The letters will state that EOEA has them on file for not responding and it will be addressed at the next site visit.

Matt Casey, General Counsel – EOEA, said that under the regulations an ALR needs to submit an incident report every time there is a significant negative effect. The submission of a report is not indicative of a problem, it is just stating the reality of what is happening. Matt also asked if ALAC thought if there are any issues that should be addressed, if EOEA conducted a regulatory review. He added that there is a hearing on July 7th regarding the Ombudsman regulations. Those regs are being rescinded under EOEA and will be re-issued under EOHHS. At this time, he did not have a citation for those new EOHHS regs yet.
5. Industry Updates:

Matt Salmon mentioned that he is a member of the National Centers for Assisted Living, they had meetings with Congressional leaders in early June. 12 or 14 attended from Massachusetts and a key topic during these meetings was workforce. The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act and the Building Americas Healthcare Workforce Act are two pieces of legislation that the attendees asked Congress to take action on.

Elissa Sherman, President – LeadingAge Massachusetts, LeadingAge Massachusetts recently held their first in-person board meeting in over two years. She mentioned it was great to be together again and continue strategic planning work. Part of their focus is workforce development and diversity, equity, and inclusion in the aging services network. LeadingAge MA will be part of LeadingAge’s national *Opening Doors* effort, which seeks to educate consumers to better understand aging services.

Brian Doherty, President & CEO – Mass-ALA, over 150 assisted living professionals attending the annual regulations training. In addition to Secretary Chen, Massachusetts also had representation from the Long-Term Care Ombudsman team, and the PACE & SCO teams at the Office of Long-Term Services and Supports. Mass-ALA continues to advocate for the Commonsense Health Care Services bill. If further action is not taken, then increased services provided by nurses in assisted living will expire July 15th, 2022.
6. Updates from Consumer Members:

Kim Martone spoke about age demographics, the age of those in assisted living is ever creeping up. She felt that EOEA and ALAC should take time to review minimum staffing requirements to ensure resident quality of life and safety.

Mary Jo Boynton agreed with Secretary Chen that the notion of teamwork is incredibly important in ALRs. She agreed with Kim that residents in ALRs are getting older and that its important to mindful of the services they need as time goes on.

David Santos noted that there has been an improvement in staff and resident morale, that had not existed in previous months. Communities feel more vibrant, and activities have returned, both indoor and outdoor. Turnover is still noteworthy, especially among Executive Directors, Regional Directors, and activities staff. This can impact resident care at the community level. He asked ALAC if they are seeing trends in turnover and what efforts are being made to retain staff. He added that burnout, retirements, and opportunities to work at home could all be factors.

Matt Salmon felt that the pool of available and qualified candidates is shallow. People who have the right skills and who deeply care about this work are in high demand and hard to find.

Elissa Sherman, LeadingAge Massachusetts, felt that retention comes down to culture. However, hiring has been a challenge, it has been difficult to fill openings.

Nicole Breslin said her organization is facing the same problems that Matt Salmon’s is. She added that high gas prices have been a concern of staff. As a result, her company has changed the shifts of maintenance staff to 4 10-hour days. This has made them happy, as it is one less day they have to drive to the worksite. Her company is also doing 60 day stay interviews with new staff and stay interviews every 6 months for staff. These have been surprisingly successful. Another successful scheduling change has been that cooks do not have to work past 7:30 pm.

Joe Carella, Scandinavian Living Center, felt the industry is going through a transition because of COVID-19. He felt that open lines of communication with staff are hugely important.

Secretary Chen recalled hearing that an ALR was paying for English as a Second Language training for their staff. Examples like these are incentives. She also shared a story about MIT students and their Banana Program that has made bananas available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It offered a hangout for students, and it became an incubator for discussions. She concluded that this story speaks to how to serve so many purposes because of bananas.

Walter Ohanian, The Grantham Group, felt that creating an environment where residents and staff are treated like family is important. A culture like that brings people in and retains them. He echoed the same hiring challenges mentioned by previous speakers as well. His team has worked more creatively with scheduling, such as discontinuing mandatory every other weekend shifts. He mentioned schedules for cooks and those who are parents.
7. State Assigned Seats:

Donna Bucca, Assisted Living Ombudsman – EOHHS, the LTCO office is fully staffed and volunteer recruitment will begin in the Springfield area this fall. With respect to staffing in ALRs, Donna said that her experience has been that money is an incentive to bring people in, but respect is why people stay. She felt that this filters down to residents as well. If staff feel like part of the organization, it has good outcomes for residents. In addition, some families believe that their loved ones are not getting the care that they need- this can also be the result of not enough staffing. Moveouts and evictions have also been on the rise as well. ALRs should clarify what ALRs can and cannot do when residents move in, so as to set expectations.

Secretary Chen noted that closures have gone up in the past 5 years. She urged the network to let EOEA know if a residence is thinking of closing, so that the ASAP/AAA network can be engaged- especially if residents choose to move into the community.
8. Comments from Visitors:

No comments from visitors.
9. Other items for discussion:

None.
10. Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 11:04 AM. The next meeting will be held Tuesday, September 27th, 2022 at 10:00 AM.