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ESAAL PUSHING FOR THE SAFE REOPENING OF ASSISTED LIVING HAIR SALONS AND REINSTATED COMMUNITY DINING

***New York State Should Base Re-opening These Services Based on Adult Care Facilities /
Assisted Living Data and Facts, Not Nursing Homes***

Clifton Park, New York – August 14, 2020 – Blanket rules for both Skilled Nursing Facilities and Adult Care/Assisted Living continue to be enforced by New York State despite stark differences in the characteristics of the two resident populations, and despite difference in COVID-related data. The pandemic has required assisted living residents to be isolated for a long time to the detriment of their emotional and mental well-being. When it comes to resuming hair salon services and communal dining and activities, Empire State Association of Assisted Living (ESAAL) is now working with the New York State Department of Health to separate and differentiate policies that reduce isolation and allow more freedoms for the less-vulnerable assisted living residents.

“ESAAL represents more than 300 licensed Adult Care Facilities and Assisted Living providers throughout New York State. It’s our job to make sure that the residents in these communities are being treated fairly,” said Lisa Newcomb, Executive Director, Empire State Association of Assisted Living.

Newcomb recently testified before the NY State Legislature, and in her testimony as well as in a letter to the NYS Department of Health is imploring them to update many policies, especially the re-opening of hair salons within ACF communities and the reinstatement of community dining and small group activities.

Re-open hair salons: Since New York began to re-open, ESAAL has repeatedly requested that the Department allow ACFs to re-open their hair salons. A recent ESAAL member poll shows 74% of the 185 respondents have had residents leave the premises, with many for the express purpose to get their hair done. Once residents leave, the ACF has no control over whether proper protocols are followed. Because ACFs must follow strict infection prevention and cleaning protocols, residents would be safer if they were able to use the residence’s hair salon, with hairdressers tested weekly like other “staff”.

In the letter, ESAAL shared its thoughts about how to reopen salons safely to reduce resident exposure to the general population, recommending the following safety guidelines:

- Hairstylist should be subject to the same testing standard as the assisted living communities own employees;
- Limit salon personnel to one at a time;
- Limit residents using the salon to one at a time;
- Require both resident and salon staff member to wear masks for the entirety of the service; and
- Require the salon staff member to sanitize the salon area, chair, sink and other equipment prior to each resident's service, with assisted living management's supervision.

Resuming community dining and activities: Noting that CDC guidelines for communal dining and activities does not include this standard, ESAAL recommended that the Department revise the policy that all communal dining and group activities be canceled if there is one confirmed case of COVID. Using more nuanced and thoughtful criteria, other residents should continue to enjoy communal dining and activities, using all required precautions.

Newcomb concludes, "Assisted living is a very socially-oriented model. Residents have been isolated from their fellow residents for too long. We can reunite them safely. It's time."

About Empire State Association of Assisted Living

Empire State Association of Assisted Living is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to strengthening New York State's assisted living sector and promoting the best interests of providers and residents. Founded in 1979, ESAAL is the only association that exclusively represents the assisted living industry, serving 300 Assisted Living Residences, Adult Homes, Enriched Housing Programs and Assisted Living Programs throughout New York State. These member residences are home to more than 30,000 seniors.

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