



ANGELO SANTABARBARA
Assemblyman 111th District

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

CHAIR
Subcommittee on Autism
Spectrum Disorders
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June 12th, 2020

The Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor, State of New York
State Capitol Building
Executive Chamber
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I write regarding much-needed clarification on family visitation for those in nursing homes who have not been with loved ones for more than three months. This is an issue that must be discussed in greater details during your next briefing.

New York State is now taking significant steps to re-open the economy and mass gatherings are happening on a daily basis even with restrictions in place, yet many who have loved ones in nursing homes are still waiting to know when they can visit their families again. As many regions are moving into Phase 2 and 3 of the process, these families deserve some clarity on when they can expect to have some form of in person visitation. So far, the answers we have received from state agencies basically amounts to: "We need to see what the data provides." This has given these families little comfort and hope. In some areas there have been zero COVID-19 cases and still there has been no change the restrictions currently in place.

Along with nursing homes, many others are struggling with having their loved ones with disabilities isolated in state facilities and residential programs like Schenectady ARC. These children and adults have been without the physical support of their families for the past 3 months, only able see their loved ones on a screen. In some cases some of these individuals are non-verbal and unable to use a smartphone for Face Time, so they're restricted to just a phone call with a staff member, unable to communicate with their parents for months. Many were hoping to see family visitation in Phase 3, but it's unclear when it will be.

One family wrote the following: *"As a parent I am sure you understand the difficulty with not being able to see your children, getting phone calls about them crying (he is not the only one crying), acting out, sad and not having the ability to communicate over the computer or phone."* I assure you there are many families in this situation. Having a son with autism, I do understand what they are going through and I'm hoping you will too after reading this letter. These individuals need to see their families again.

Sincerely,

Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara
Assembly Chair of the Sub-Committee on Autism Spectrum Disorders