

JUNE 17, 2020

STEELWORKERS ORGANIZATION OF ACTIVE RETIREES (SOAR) CHAPTER 10
HAMILTON, ON

PRESENTATION ON Bill 175.

Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act 2020.

The Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) Chapter 10 represents retired Steelworkers in the greater Hamilton area. This is not just workers from Stelco, but includes International Harvester/J.I. Case, Otis Elevator, Arcelor Mittal Hamilton East, Frost Fence, National Steel Car and many smaller manufacturing plants. The members of SOAR Chapter 10 were hoping to see an independent public inquiry into our seriously broken long-term-care system as Keith Leslie calls for in his eloquently written editorial in the Hamilton Spectator. The Spectators View published May 21, 2020 states "This week, the government voted against an NDP motion that would have resulted in a full independent public inquiry into Ontario's long-term care system. That was a mistake and one the government will probably live to regret. Ford and his previously nearly-unknown minister of long term care Merrilee Fullerton both insist they know the system is broken, but a public inquiry is not needed and would take too long to deliver results. Instead, they promise a government review of the system which they say can move more quickly and can deliver urgent remedial action. Maybe, Maybe not. But if there was ever a case for a full public inquiry surely this is it." To quote 3 professors from York University, Bruce Campbell, Mark Winfield and Pat Armstrong, from their Spectator article referring to the Covid- 19 crisis "The scale of this disaster is unprecedented, making anything but a full-fledged public inquiry unacceptable." The Members of SOAR Chapter 10 certainly agree with these views. Since this commission is all that is available at this time, SOAR will use this opportunity to make our views and opinions known.

The problems facing residents of long term care facilities are not new. These problems have existed for many years and with fewer inspections have only gotten worse. In September 2003, United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton held a panel discussion on health care and seniors. Bill Scandlan, a retired Steelworker Staff Representative and former Hamilton City councillor and SOAR member wrote a brief and presented it to the panel. Many of the issues presented then are still issues today. One that comes to mind was a mutual friend Gord, who had many challenges caused by having Polio as an infant, Gord had moved in to an assisted care facility in Hamilton, the cost for him was \$1550 per month. He was allowed only one bath a week; a second bath would cost \$25. Today, at a home in Dundas which is part of a large chain, residents are allowed one bath a week with additional baths costing \$25. A resident is allowed 1 load of laundry a week and if they have soiled their linens, for example, there is a charge of \$17 for the second laundry. If a resident cuts themselves and requires a band aid the charge is \$3 and a charge of \$50 per month for daily dressing changes. The understaffed and overworked PSW's were receiving approximately \$14.50 per hour two years ago when I was given this information. What has changed in the past 17 years? To the members of SOAR we can't see any improvements and it is our observations that conditions are only getting worse. This is more than confirmed by the Canadian Military in their report condemning the conditions on the homes where they assisted in Ontario.

In SOAR's presentation we are going to raise several issues, but not all of the concerns expressed by our members. We are also going to quote numerous articles and individuals from articles and editorials found recently in the Hamilton Spectator.

SOAR Chapter 10 believes that each resident should have a minimum of 4 hours of care each day. The position of the Ont. Health Coalition is that the Province institutes a minimum care standard in long-term care. There has been a deep consensus for decades that the rising acuity of long-term care residents requires more care. This can't be left to operators to do on their own and resources, both financial and human, need to be provided to support this. There can't be further delay in beginning to move to a 4-hour average minimum care level for residents in long-term care to protect their safety and the safety of staff. To quote Mark Ewer a former LTC administrator in a Spectator article "There should be a higher standard for the number of hours of care each resident is entitled to and homes should be funded to that level." From an article by Thomas Walkom in referring to the homes in the Military's damning report stated "We knew such homes are routinely understaffed, a state of affairs that leads workers to cut corners." To quote Elizabeth Clarke a registered nurse and former director of a for profit nursing home in a Geoffrey Stevens article "She urges that realistic staff/patient ratios be standardized across the industry. To expect one PSW to get 10 residents up, bathed, and to breakfast in two hours is simply not realistic. This is how accidents happen, seniors get injured and staff burn out. "

SOAR Chapter 10 is concerned about the reduction and quality of inspections of our long-term care homes. The report by the military, who were only in several homes for a few weeks could be so appalled by the conditions they found, that they issued a condemning report then obviously the inspections of LTC in Ontario are grossly inadequate. CBC News reviewed inspection reports from the last five years for all long-term care homes in the province and found that while most received a comprehensive resident quality inspection in 2015, 2016 and 2017, the number dropped to just over one half in 2018 and just nine last year. The problems at the Rosslyn care home in Hamilton and other problems at other local homes only show how wide spread these appalling conditions are. To quote a recent Spectator article by investigative reporter Steve Buist about the Rosslyn, "former staff members at the Rosslyn say a big problem is that the regulatory agencies often give the operators of the home advance notice that an inspection will be conducted allowing them to make slapdash efforts at cleaning up the property." A former Maintenance worker in the same article stated "he wasn't given a proper budget to maintain the home and repairs were often pushed off." He also stated "maintenance –wise, they would not spend a dime on the place unless they absolutely had to." In the same article a former nurse, stated "if they were doing this 17 years ago and they are still doing it now, nothing will ever change." "They don't care about these residents," she added "the only thing they care about is the money." Again from Geoffrey Steven's spectator article Elizabeth Clarke stated "Our nursing home was notified well in advance of an upcoming visit by the (provincial) government inspector. This time was used to hire temporary staff and improve conditions in the home. Following the inspection, this staff was laid off."

It is good news that the Rosslyn's licence has been revoked by the province; however that should be just the beginning of cleaning up our LTC homes. SOAR Chapter 10 agrees with the statement by NDP leader Andrea Horwath that the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority (RHRA) be dismantled and the oversight of the retirement home industry be the responsibility of the provincial government. SOAR Chapter 10 does not believe in industries policing themselves through agencies or authorities. We believe that this is not good for the workers, the LTC residents, the resident's families or the community.

There has been much attention around inadequate wages paid to LTC home employees and the use of part time employees who have had to work at two or more homes in order to earn a living. This has been a contributing factor in the spread of Covid- 19 as well as other infections. There are potential problems with some for profit homes possibly using PWS and other staff that are not qualified. In June 13, Spectator's investigation into the Rosslyn care home a former nurse alleged "she was aware of two personal support workers at the Rosslyn who did not have proper PSW certificates" When profit comes first there are many way to cut costs, paying low wages and possibly hiring unqualified workers are two of them. This is something that proper inspections could find.

Due to the high numbers of infections and deaths among both workers and residents of long term care facilities there has been a call to convert all wards and residences to single room facilities with private washrooms. SOAR Chapter 10 is all in favour of these changes. There is little doubt that this will be at a substantial cost and already there are call from both for profit and non- profit LTC facilities for additional funding. If this conversion to private rooms takes place and it should, the first thing that needs to be reviewed is the profit margin. SOAR fully understands that the administrators of LTC facilities are not responsible to their staff, the residents, or their families and do only what the province regulates them to do. The administrator's responsibility is to the shareholders and their boards of directors.

In Conclusion, SOAR Chapter 10 would like to see:-

1. No new for profit LTC facilities and any new homes are not for profits or community run.
2. The RHRA dismantled and responsibility of inspections done by provincial inspectors with the authority to demand immediate improvements to a home if required. All homes to be given a complete, unannounced inspection yearly, with all staff being interviewed by the inspectors, not just the administration interviewed.
3. A living wage paid to all LTC staff so they don't have to have multiple jobs. In addition any part time staffs is paid the same rate of pay as full time staff for performing the same or similar duties and any benefits the full staff have the part time be paid on a pro-rated basis.
4. To ensure the protection of Staff and residents that all homes are converted to private rooms and private washroom facilities.
5. All residents receive an average of 4 hour per day.
6. All staff receives proper training and has the necessary equipment available to provide safe and adequate care for all residents.