



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA PIONEER HOMES
Director's Office

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April 22, 2020

Dear Families, Residents, Friends and Staff:

It has now been more than a month since we closed the Pioneer Homes to visitors. As heartbreaking as this is for all of us, everyone has worked hard to ensure elders and their families maintain contact. I appreciate everyone's continued commitment to the residents. The homes have received generous donations of food, supplies, equipment and flowers as well as encouraging signs, cards, letters, pictures, poems and even chalk sidewalk drawings for residents and staff! Through phone calls, newsletters, emails, Skype, FaceTime and Facebook, much time has been spent furthering connections between residents and loved ones. It makes our hearts happy to see and hear the love and support that residents and staff are receiving.

As we move forward with continued restrictions on visitation, I want to assure each of you that these connections are a priority, and will continue to be a priority, for the Pioneer Homes. The health of everyone associated with the homes is paramount and an important component of people's whole health is their emotional well-being. This pandemic and the separation that it has required is difficult; continuing connections and decreasing stress and uncertainty through communication and education is vital to maintaining everyone's health.

Another important topic I want to share with you is regarding the risk of COVID-19 infection and what the Pioneer Homes are doing to decrease this risk. Each home continues to conduct a health screening for all personnel entering the building, which is currently limited only to staff and essential health care personnel. The homes are also continuing to fine-tune the use of personal protective equipment based on risk of exposure and the increasing availability of supplies. Residents and staff are being screened for symptoms, and any employee who has symptoms is sent home immediately. Any resident who has symptoms is tested in-house and quarantined in their room until test results are received. If a resident is tested, the primary family contact or representative will be notified promptly. Please be aware that we are testing for almost any symptom a resident may display. If you receive a phone call, we will inform you of the symptom that prompted us to test. Testing does not mean that we believe the resident has COVID-19; it means that we are being extremely cautious.

If a resident is positive for COVID-19, the primary family contact or representative will be notified immediately. We will also immediately notify the Alaska Section of Epidemiology (under the Division of Public Health) and the state's Assisted Living Licensing Office. These are the divisions that will help us address any infection situation that arises. Representatives of residents living in the Pioneer Home where there was a positive test result of staff or resident will be notified by the home within 24 hours. With this notification we will include information about the plan developed with Public Health

and Assisted Living Licensing. Currently each home has a plan, but implementation of these plans may vary depending on circumstances. After family members of the impacted home are notified, the unaffected Pioneer Homes will begin notifying the primary family contact or representative of residents in those homes. We will attempt to reach every resident's primary contact in all Pioneer Homes in less than 48 hours. Our goal will be for this contact to happen before the communities are made aware through a press release.

The Division of Alaska Pioneer Homes is committed to communicating with families and their representatives. As always, we will strive to be honest, transparent and forthcoming. We will follow our current practice of notifying one primary family contact, and depend on that person to communicate with the extended family. Please contact your Pioneer Home or the Division of Alaska Pioneer Homes Central Office if your contact information needs to be updated.

Thank you for your patience as we work to keep our residents healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heidi Hamilton".

Heidi Hamilton, ANP
APRNII
Division of Alaska Pioneer Homes
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