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SPEAKING OUT

Older adults deserve better from Gov. Hochul

Your Turn

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Guest columnist

Gov. Kathy Hochul might not care about older adults in New York State. That's the only plausible reason she would propose cuts to nursing home reimbursement in her budget delivered Jan. 16. With inadequate rates that already translate to a Medicaid funding gap of \$810 million, a budget that cuts the long-term care sector by an additional \$600 million or more indicates an alarming level of confusion in Albany.

New York nursing homes serve a critical role within the health care system. Approximately 97,000 New Yorkers and their families depend on them when care at home is no longer possible. Over 70% of residents in nursing homes rely on Medicaid to pay for their care, but the state is not honoring its end of that arrangement. The reality is that New York is ignoring its responsibility to properly fund the Medicaid rate and, in effect, is defaulting on this promise to care for our most vulnerable.

The impact extends to our local health care systems and paints a grim picture, resulting in the hospitals' inability to discharge patients in need of lower levels of care, extremely long emergency visit wait times and EMTs waiting hours to move patients out of ambulances. Likewise, families reach out to us daily seeking care for their loved ones. Sadly, we are often forced to turn them away due to inadequate Medicaid funding. This trend is unsustain-



New York Gov. Kathy Hochul makes her budget proposal. PROVIDED BY OFFICE OF GOV. KATHY HOCHUL

able. Why isn't the care of the oldest members of our community — and the fastest growing population — a priority?

Since 2008, the rate has remained largely stagnant while costs have risen by more than 40%. Last year's increase of 6.5% was the largest in decades, but that adjustment didn't even cover last year's cost increase due to the 8% inflation rate. After decades of underfunding, an \$810 million funding gap persists — this is the dire reality.

Nursing home closures are happening at an accelerating pace, especially not-for-profit or county homes that have been in the community for generations. Over 90% of nursing homes in upstate New York are unable to cover operating costs and 75% struggle to find sufficient staff to meet minimum staffing levels, making beds unavailable to those in need.

So, what is the governor's plan? There is no plan. It's now up to our state

Assembly and Senate representatives to clear up the governor's confusion and misplaced priorities. It's time to face the risk of inaction, the damage of underfunding and seeing our nursing homes have to close their doors. This, too, is reality.

Michael S. King is president and CEO of Jewish Senior Life and a member of Alliance for Senior Care IPA, a coalition of over 25 not-for-profit nursing homes across Upstate New York.