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Families and friends of high-risk older adults,

We begin our message today acknowledging the deep grief, anxiety, and bone-deep fatigue that you are each feeling. It has been a long nine months. Since March, too many precious residents of long-term care have succumbed to a disease that we had not yet heard of one year ago. Those of us that work with older adults feel their absence deeply: gone from us are their wisdom, life stories, talents, humor, quiet reassurances and laughter. We know you have made sacrifices to preserve the safety of strangers and for that we are deeply, humbly grateful.

Each day in Ohio, daily case counts leap by hundreds and even thousands. At the same time, each day brings us closer to Thanksgiving and the season of gathering. For those of us already struggling to keep COVID-19 out of congregate care buildings, out of your loved ones' homes, it feels like we are on a collision course, set to impact in the weeks following the holiday.

Many of you have already chosen to make sacrifices during the holidays for the safety of our loved ones and indeed, for people you will never know. To those who have cancelled large family gatherings or made plans to visit your older adult loved one at their place of residence: thank you from the bottom of my heart. I know it wasn't an easy decision to make.

There is no limit to creativity in finding new ways to celebrate. Last year, none of us fathomed how much connection could be found online. We didn't imagine window visits, drive-by parade parties, or distanced meals.

Please consider the following ways to make the holiday safe, and fun:

- Set up a remote visit with your loved one before the meal, so they can walk you through preparing a favorite recipe.
- After having dinner with your household members, hold an extended-family zoom party over dessert.
- Host or attend a virtual dinner with friends and family. Just agree to a mealtime, and set a place at the table for your laptop or tablet.
- Participate in Cyber Monday or online Black Friday deals.
- Watch sporting events, parades and movies at home, while talking to your loved one on the phone. Make it special by dropping off a "care package" a few days before: a comfy blanket, favorite snacks and beverages.

To those who are planning to bring an older adult loved one home for the holiday, please consider these precautions:

- Holding a "pre-meal" earlier in the day that the older loved one can attend, with just one or two people that have been able to quarantine prior. The loved one can attend this meal, then return to the nursing home or assisted living residence, and a larger, extended family gathering can follow.
- Ensuring that all individuals that the loved one will be in contact with have quarantined for the 14 days preceding the holiday. This would require severely limiting contact with others beginning last Thursday, November 12. If a family hasn't begun quarantining, they can delay the holiday by a week or two, until they've had sufficient time to prepare.

- Monitoring all individuals for symptoms, including fevers, cough, or other COVID-19 symptoms. Ensure use of proper thermometer or ensure individuals take their own temperature prior to joining the meal.
- As an additional precaution, asking anyone who will have contact with the loved one to obtain a negative COVID-19 test result prior to the holiday gathering.
- Ensuring all spaces—including the vehicle, kitchen, bathrooms, and all gathering areas - are clean and sanitized immediately prior to the visit. An extra precaution could be to ensure that no other person has used these spaces for several days prior to Thanksgiving.

If you cannot take these important, preventative steps, we implore you not to bring an older adult to your home for the holiday. Even if you and your loved one are willing to take these risks, we encourage you to think of other residents of the home, the medically-fragile child of the employee, the staff member who is choosing to work despite risk to their health and their family's. If you have not done so already, consider reaching out to the Administrator of the nursing home or assisted living where your loved one resides. Ask them what special precautions they would recommend be taken and what steps they will take upon your loved one's return to the community (infection control procedures, quarantining for 14 days or longer may be required, etc.). Ask what celebrations they are planning for your loved one at the facility to make sure holiday is spent in good company and cheer.

There has never been a time when we were so constantly acting as our brother's keeper. Every day in these small ways, we protect each other:

- Wear a mask anytime you are around people outside your home. This is proven to cut significantly the transmission of your germs to others. That's right, a mask won't protect you so much as it protects those around you. Look at mask wearing as an act of love – for your friends and co-workers, our residents, and total strangers you may come across at Kroger.
- Maintain a safe distance of at least six feet from other people. When combined with mask wearing, this will go a long way in protecting you as well as those around you.
- Avoid groups, gatherings, parties, restaurants and entertainment events. Period. Informal gatherings have been driving infections statewide. I know this virus makes for a boring life, but understand, it is only for a time until we have a vaccine available. A little self-sacrifice is far better than sickness, or worse.
- Wash your hands. Often. For 20 seconds.

In closing, we acknowledge the sacrifices families have already made this year and the pain of prolonged separation. It is one of the things we are most grateful for this Thanksgiving. We believe that by sacrificing just a little bit more, we may all find a seat at the table next year.

Respectfully,



Kathryn Lasley Brod
President/CEO