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**SENATOR NAN RICH CALLS ON LEGISLATURE TO KEEP ITS  
COMMITMENT TO FLORIDA'S NURSING HOME PATIENTS**

**Tallahassee-** State Senator Nan Rich (D-Weston) on Thursday called on the Florida Legislature to keep its commitment to the state's nursing home residents and dedicate the needed Medicaid funding for their care.

"Florida made a commitment to implement and fund one of the nation's highest nursing home staffing standards," said Rich. "This commitment to our state's elders who require nursing home care must be honored. It takes money to pay the competitive salaries and benefits needed to recruit and retain the qualified nurses, nursing assistants, and other trained staff. We made a promise to Florida's seniors that we ought to be obliged to keep."

Already reeling from a January 1, 2008 budget reduction of \$75 million, the current Senate proposal would mean nursing home payment rates would be set back to levels inadequate to provide as little as 2.0 hours of certified nursing assistant care per resident per day.

The upper chamber's plan also calls for eliminating automatic cost of living increases for all future years.

Additional cuts, as contemplated in the proposed budget for fiscal year 2008-09 (\$142 million reduction), would nearly double these losses. This would increase the average per diem loss for Medicaid residents from \$12.14 to over \$21.

Senator Rich said she feared that the reduction in the number of complaints and noncompliance citations since the first phase of the increased staffing mandates was implemented in 2002 will be reversed, and care will once again begin to decline.

"Approximately 70 percent of nursing home expenditures are for staff," she said. "There is no possible way to implement any budget cuts of significance without adversely affecting facility staff and consequently the quality of care nursing home residents depend on for survival."

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