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## **LeadingAge Ohio member joins Gov. DeWine's press conference to share story**

**COLUMBUS, Ohio** – A staff member from LeadingAge Ohio member Genacross Lutheran Services in Toledo joined Governor Mike DeWine today during a press briefing on the COVID-19 pandemic. Carrie Watkins, Assistant Director of Nursing at Genacross' Wolf Creek campus in Holland, Ohio, spoke with Governor DeWine on the effect of the pandemic in long-term care settings, and shared personal stories and experiences.

Watkins shared the challenges staff face while spread thin and dealing with halts on visitation.

"The staff is spread very, very thin. We've turned into an extended family for our residents since their families can't come in and see them right now. As nurses and caregivers, we work so hard to take care of our residents."

Watkins shared a story of a staff member who returned from maternity leave to discover the virus had struck the facility.

"One of my nurses came back from maternity leave, and her hall of 22 residents, out of 22 residents she had cared for years, almost half of them had passed away. The pain and emotion I saw in her face...was devastating."

She shared her sadness that the virus hit her facility, despite best uses of infection control procedure and PPE.

"We're seeing now that there's such a higher rise of cases in the community, that it's getting into nursing facilities and taking over. We've had great surveys and great management of infection control in our facilities, but it still manages to get in. People need to understand that their actions have unintended consequences. Even if you don't have a loved one in a nursing home, you can start a chain reaction that comes right into my building."

"These lives are worth protecting," finished Watkins.

Genacross Lutheran Services operates three high-quality senior living communities in northwest Ohio, as well as family and youth services, home and community based services, home care, and a dozen affordable housing properties.

"Carrie's statements are reflective of the challenges Genacross faces at all of our campuses," stated Rick Marshall, president and CEO of Genacross Lutheran Services. "While our staff have continued to implement best practices on infection control, with all facilities earning high marks from regulators, and continue to use PPE appropriately, the contagious nature of this virus makes it almost impossible to keep out of congregate care settings if Ohioans are not taking the threat seriously."

These stories help shed light on the ongoing challenges faced by long-term care workers, both before and throughout the pandemic.

"To protect our most high-risk Ohioans, state leaders must continue to make long-term care a priority," added Kathryn Brod, president and CEO of LeadingAge Ohio. "Everyone deserves to live in a home that is safe and enables us to be healthy. Those of us who live in nursing homes or rely on aging services simply need different supports for that to happen."

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*Founded in 1937, LeadingAge Ohio is a nonprofit organization that represents over 400 long-term care organizations and hospices, as well as those providing ancillary health care and housing services, in more than 150 Ohio towns and cities. The continuum of care reflected by the member organizations serve an estimated 400,000 elderly Ohioans daily and employ more than 35,000 persons statewide.*