March 13th, 2023

The Honorable Jim Wood  
Chair, Assembly Health Committee  
1020 N Street, Room 390  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 488 (Nguyen) – Support

Dear Chair Wood,

The California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA), one of the state’s foremost grassroots senior and disability advocacy organizations, representing over 1 million Californians, is proud to support AB 48 (Nguyen), which will utilize existing Medi-Cal funds to enable skilled nursing facilities to contract for staff training and services that residents with vision loss need and will dramatically improve residents’ lives.

Recent studies and data show that some 50% of skilled nursing facility residents experience significant vision loss. Yet, for the most part, skilled nursing facilities do not provide staff training to assist individuals with vision loss. These facilities seldom produce materials in accessible formats, such as large print or audio files. Therefore, individuals with low vision are often unable to have access to registration documents, schedules, menus, and other important materials.

Skilled nursing facility residents with vision loss lack the assistive technology that could enable them to use devices and resources to aid in their independence. They are unable to navigate these facilities, which often have difficult paths of travel. As a result, many residents with vision loss suffer from isolation, mental distress, and the inability to leave the facility and return to the community.

In most areas of California, people with vision loss can obtain a variety of services, including orientation and mobility, independent living skills, technology training, low-vision aids, and vision therapy services that are essential to maximize their ability to live independently. However, skilled nursing facility staff are rarely aware of these services. Even when staff are aware, referrals for these residents are seldom made to providers of the above services.

Failure by skilled nursing facilities to meet the needs of skilled nursing facility residents with vision loss is a violation of federal and state law, including the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and Section 11135 of the California Code.
Many skilled nursing home residents have low incomes and rely on Medi-Cal. AB488 would require that skilled nursing facilities pay for staff training to assist residents with vision loss with existing Medi-Cal funds. The bill would enable facility operators and staff to provide services that can fully integrate people who are blind or have low vision into facility activities and enable staff to make referrals to qualified medical and non-medical service providers.

Affording Seniors viable resources to age with grace, dignity and independence - such as improving the conditions in skilled nursing facilities - not only represent CARA’s foundational principles but we believe will ensure a safer, more accessible and inclusive California for our aging community.

Please vote yes on AB 488.

Sincerely,

Hene Kelly
Chair, Legislative Committee
California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA)

Keith Umemoto
Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA)