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‘Total Disrespect’: LTC Residents, Families & Staff Incensed that Premier Ford Dodged Question Period Today While Hundreds Waited for Commitments to Improve Care

Toronto –More than 570 families, residents, staff and supporters registered to virtually fill the galleries of the Ontario Legislature for Question Period today. Thousands more watched on the Ontario Health Coalition’s Facebook livestream. They came to hear the Ford government answer their questions and demands for vital improvements to long-term care. However, Premier Ford and LTC Minister Merrilee Fullerton did not show up.

Through individual stories sent in by LTC families and staff, the Health Coalition asked the Opposition Parties to challenge Premier Ford to commit to fast-tracking improvements in staffing in the homes. On this issue, Minister of LTC Merrilee Fullerton doubled down on Saturday, tweeting: “We are addressing the long-standing staffing issues in #LTC with our commitment to deliver an average of 4 hours of daily direct care per resident, on average [sic], in 4 years.” In context, the 4-year delay is longer than the lifespan of most LTC residents. That timeline— a policy decision by the Ford government in December-- puts off even the first 15-minute care increase until April 2022 and is not enough, in any case, to get care levels back to pre-pandemic status, which was already a crisis. Through the pandemic, LTC staffing, and thus care, have declined dangerously, and needed basic care is not being provided.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath and NDP MPPs advocated for increased care with strength and passion on behalf of the families and staff watching. The LTC Commission recommended as a top priority that the staffing improvements be fast-tracked. Today, Conservative Party House Leader Paul Calandra, who answered all the questions directed to the absent Premier, would not make any commitment to do so. The Coalition is asking media to please follow up: it appears that the Ford government has made a policy decision to not follow this recommendation.

The Coalition asked the Opposition Parties to call for the reinstatement of annual comprehensive surprise inspections of LTC homes, cancelled by Ford government after it took office; another priority recommendation of the LTC Commission. Today, both NDP and Liberal MPPs raised the issues of inspections and enforcement. On behalf of families and the Coalition the NDP repeatedly called for a commitment to end for-profit LTC. On both of these issues, Minister Calandra would make no commitment.

Families demanded accountability for the LTC operators whose negligence caused the death of their loved ones. Liberal Health Critic John Fraser, NDP Leader Andrea Horwath and many NDP MPPs raised these questions. Their questions were met with a fuzzy reiteration of the claim that the government is working with the Coroner to investigate. Note: four days ago, the Minister – under renewed media scrutiny and a year after Premier Ford promised to hold the homes accountable-- sent in Ministry inspectors to investigate the deaths by dehydration and neglect in two homes (only) and liaise with the Coroner. That is not a Coroner’s investigation. There are far more than just two homes where families report, in grief and horror, that their loved ones died severely malnourished and dehydrated.

Families also asked, through the Opposition Parties, for the government to require LTC homes to lift the too-onerous restrictions that some continue to place on residents. Again, NDP MPPs reported the families’ stories and asked for redress. Minister Calandra, speaking for the Premier, made no commitment to do so.