

NEWS RELEASE

Congressman Walter B. Jones

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JONES INTRODUCES BILL TO PROTECT OUR NATION'S SENIOR CITIZENS

“Millions of people reside in assisted living facilities. We need to ensure the staff of these communities have been properly screened and are qualified to be there.”

WASHINGTON, DC - Third District Representative Walter Jones today introduced the Nursing Home Resident Safety Assurance Act. This legislation would amend Public Law 105-277, which currently requires federal criminal background checks on direct care personnel to also allow background checks on indirect care personnel such as nurses' aides, maintenance workers, janitors and dietary staff.

“The Nursing Home Resident Safety Assurance Act would require criminal background checks on all nursing home personnel who have direct access to seniors in nursing homes. Today's law allows indirect care personnel to avoid the screening procedures that direct care personnel, such as physical therapists and licensed nurse practitioners are required to have,” Congressman Jones said today. “The current loophole in the law puts our society's most vulnerable members, the elderly and disabled in circumstances rife with opportunities for abuse and exploitation.”

A few years ago, the North Carolina legislature recognized this potential for abuse and passed legislation requiring criminal background checks for both direct and indirect care nursing home personnel who have not lived in the state for 5 years. However, Public Law 105-277 unintentionally hinders this background check process by preventing the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from releasing background information on indirect care personnel.

“Over 1.5 million of our country's seniors reside in nursing homes or some type of assisted living community,” Congressman Jones explained. “What saddens me is that studies have found over 30 percent of nursing homes in the United States were cited for an abuse violation between January 1, 1999 and January 1, 2001. This means that thousands of nursing home residents in the 5,283 facilities cited were subject to situations endangering their personal safety. Congress must do its part to stop this.”

For additional information or to schedule an interview with Congressman Walter B. Jones please contact Lanier Swann at (202) 225-3415 or via email at lanier.swann@mail.house.gov.