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State senators hear of nursing home bias

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Amid rising concerns over the treatment of Illinois nursing home residents, the state Senate's public health committee met today to discuss racial disparities in quality and care.

The hearing stemmed from an eight-month investigation by the [Chicago Reporter](#) magazine that identified inequities between nursing homes where the majority of residents are black and homes where a majority of residents are white.

Illinois has the highest number of poorly rated black nursing homes nationwide, as rated by Nursing Home Compare, a Web site that maintains a federal database of Medicaid and Medicare-certified nursing homes.

The disparities are more acute in [Chicago](#), where the lowest rating was given to nearly 60 percent of the 30 black nursing homes. In contrast, 11 percent of the city's 45 white homes received the lowest rating. Thirty percent of the white homes received the highest rating, compared with none of the black homes.

Black nursing homes also averaged more violations than white homes, according to the Reporter, which focuses on issues of race and poverty. It also found residents at black facilities received less care from highly trained staff than their white counterparts.

"Illinois is arguably the worst state in the country for black seniors seeking nursing home care," said Kimbriell Kelly, the Reporter's editor.

Senators also heard from several health care workers who touted the quality and staff-to-resident ratios at their respective nursing homes. Sen. Jacqueline Collins, D-[Chicago](#), said she believed they were passionate about their jobs, but felt the owners of the facilities should have attended the hearing.

"This is not to impugn your commitment or dedication," Collins said. "Many of these nursing homes have the same owners, yet there are disparities in the level of care. Clearly, there's a problem here."

Ruqaiyah Yearby, a law professor at the University of Buffalo who testified Thursday, said the Midwest has the highest degree of racial segregation among its nursing homes. [Chicago](#) is ranked sixth out of the 10 metropolitan areas with the most racially segregated nursing home populations.

Yearby recommended several steps to end racial bias in Illinois nursing homes, including adding a civil rights section to the Illinois Nursing Home Care Act that prohibits racial bias in admissions and the quality of care.

Next month, the committee is scheduled to address nursing home placement and safety in response to a Tribune investigation, called "Compromised Care," that found government, law enforcement and the nursing home industry failed to manage younger residents who shuttle into facilities from jails, shelters and psychiatric wards.

Using Tribune data, the Reporter found that black nursing homes were more likely than white homes to house numerous ex-offenders and sex offenders.

--Kristen Mack

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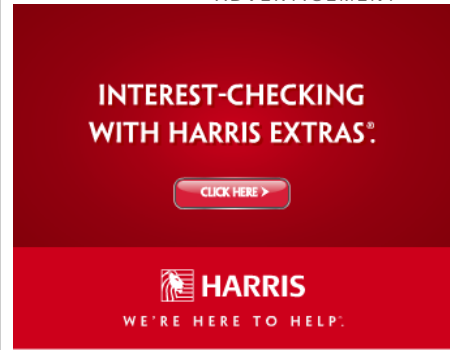
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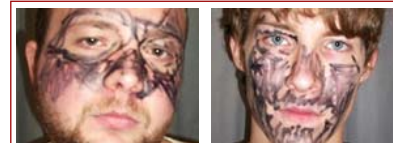


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