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Voice of the People, Feb. 5

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Nursing-home safety

Thank you for the article "Nursing homes' toll: 86 sex cases, 1 arrest; Rape allegations reported in a quarter of Chicago's 119 centers since July '07" (Page 1, Jan. 27). As an attorney who represents families and individuals in cases involving nursing-home abuse and neglect, and an advocate for nursing-home reform, I applaud your efforts to raise public awareness surrounding the conditions and safety issues in Chicago's nursing homes.

You note that most of the homes where sexual attacks occurred operated with insufficient staff. Substandard staffing is the cause of most nursing-home safety issues. The examples in your article illustrate the critical need for adequate staffing in nursing homes to protect residents from harm or abuse.

Many nursing-home owners emphasize census over care and revenue over residents. This results in homes employing insufficient, not properly trained and not properly motivated staff. Direct-care workers cannot provide care to residents if they are undertrained and the home is understaffed, and this creates an environment that allows for physical and sexual violence.

In order to end violence in nursing homes, we have to address the issue of staffing. Owners must be compelled to operate with adequate staff or residents will continue to fall victim to abuse and neglect in Chicago's nursing homes.

I urge readers to contact their state representatives to demand legislation that provides minimum staffing standards for Illinois nursing homes. Creating minimal staffing standards will reduce the horrific acts of violence that continue to occur in Chicago nursing homes and improve medical care for residents.

—*Steven M. Levin, Levin & Perconti, Chicago*