

Mary Kolar: Stay home to protect those stood up for us

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Who's them? For me, they include the over 700 members residing at our Wisconsin State Veterans Homes. As the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, I advocate on behalf of Wisconsin's 345,000 veterans and their families.

My responsibilities include overseeing our three skilled nursing facilities located at Chippewa Falls, King, and Union Grove. The residents of these Homes include the population most vulnerable to the coronavirus. Nearly all are over 60 years old and have one or more compromising medical conditions. Others in senior care facilities account for more than one fifth of the deaths due to COVID-19 in our country.

To date, I'm extremely thankful that we have had no members or staff test positive for COVID-19 in our state veterans homes. Our Homes staff follow disease prevention procedures routinely and have increased the level of cleaning and risk reduction since we became aware of the virus that has spread throughout our world. Another measure to keep the virus out of our facilities it to not allow visitors, including family, except in end-of-life circumstances.

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Helping us to stop the virus from entering our Homes are Wisconsinites following the guidance of Governor Evers's Safer at Home order. By limiting trips outside our homes, wearing masks when shopping for necessities, staying at least six feet from one another, washing our hands frequently and not touching our faces, we're helping stop the spread of COVID-19.

Maybe you know one of the members at our Veterans Homes. They are our friends

and neighbors who were willing to give their lives for us and our country. They include veterans of wars and conflicts throughout the world including World War II through Korea, and Vietnam to more recent conflicts. Some have been prisoners of war and know what true isolation and deprivation is. Most have lived through the extremes of boredom and fear that are the realities of military service. All did so for us.

They fought for us so let's continue to fight for them by staying home as much as we can. By doing so, you're helping our veterans live.

— *Kolar is the secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs.*