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CALIFORNIA'S TOP NURSING HOME REGULATOR OWNS INTEREST IN NURSING HOME CHAIN

On August 12, 2018, Politico reported that Karen Smith - the Director of the California Department of Public Health – has ownership interest in Brookdale Senior Living, which operates many long-term care facilities in California, including 10 nursing homes that are regulated by Smith's Department. According to Politico, Smith denied her financial stake in Brookdale has any effect on her decisions.

The public might disagree. Under Smith's watch, the Department has favored nursing home operators over nursing home residents at almost every opportunity. For example, Smith's Department:

- is allowing unfit and unlicensed operators to acquire and run nursing homes;
- has developed a waiver system that will allow hundreds of California's most poorly staffed nursing homes to ignore modest new staffing requirements;
- was blasted by the California State Auditor for endangering nursing home residents by failing to enforce nursing home standards;
- opposed legislation that would have required timely investigations of abuse and neglect reports filed by nursing homes; and
- continues to treat sexual assaults of nursing home residents as minor offenses.

While complaints against nursing homes soared to levels never seen before and nursing home chains siphoned off hundreds of millions of dollars intended for resident care, Smith stood silent. It is more than fair to wonder whose interests she is protecting.

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