

Action on boarding homes

At last there has been a concrete step toward enforcement of a boarding home licensing and regulation law that has been on the books in Pennsylvania for 13 years. Last week the State Department of Labor and Industry and the State Department of Public Welfare published rules on boarding homes in the state register, a necessary step before implementation. Hearings are set for January and enforcement should begin in February.

Publishing of rules and holding of hearings seem a long way from the terrible reality those bureaucratic steps attempt to address: As many as 100,000 people, many elderly, many former mental patients, living in conditions which in many instances can only be described as a gross disgrace. The reality consists of the kind of neglect that contributed to the deaths last April of 10 residents of a boarding home in Connellsville, Pa. which had been cited twice for safety code violations that were never corrected.

The rules published last week would require smoke detectors and fire extinguishers and fire drills. More importantly, the state is providing for enforcement of the rules by 40 new inspectors working for Labor and

Industry. The Welfare Department will enforce living standards, including such things as space and meal requirements.

These changes have been pitifully long in coming. The 1966 law was never enforced because it was said to be too ambiguous, because the legislature never appropriated money for its enforcement, because, at bottom, the officials in Harrisburg lacked the necessary commitment. Under some pressure, specifically from a lawsuit filed two years ago by the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia, the Thornburgh administration is now demonstrating that commitment.

The legislature is also finally doing its part. Some \$2.2 million has been appropriated to fund the program, and the House has passed a bill setting a deadline for administrative action. The Senate should follow suit. Heat from the legislature, the commitment of the Thornburgh administration, and the interest generated at January's public hearings ought to be enough to insure that not even two months of the new year will pass without the 13-year-old boarding home regulation law being enforced — well and surely.

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Ginny :

I'm really pleased with this newspaper editorial. For one of the first times, The Thornburgh Administration is the hero^{oes} in the story - and not the villain.

Bob
Robert Nelkin

should to shoulder
with the Public
Interest Law Center
of Philadelphia