



**Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 120**

**State Representative Tracy Richardson, District 86**

**House Families, Aging and Human Services Committee**

**March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

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Thank you Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Families, Aging and Human Services Committee for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 120. I stand before you today on behalf of many of our constituents. Specifically, I'm referring to Ohioians residing in long term care facilities and also their beloved family members longing to see them. Both are suffering during this COVID-19 pandemic due to separation. This bill is very similar to House Bill 770 which passed out of committee with unanimous, bipartisan support in the last General Assembly. The purpose of House Bill 120 is to ensure compassionate and life-giving interaction between residents of long-term care facilities and their loved ones.

This bill began when I first heard from a resident of my district whose work includes daily contact with senior citizens. She explained the depression, weight loss, decrease in cognitive function, and loss of will to live on the part of residents in long-term care facilities during the pandemic. She also explained that these conditions were and are exasperated by the helplessness expressed by family members wanting to impact the quality of life of their loved ones. After learning about these compelling issues, I knew we had to do something.

Thoughtfully, we looked to policy in other states and to experts to balance life-giving and vital access to residents while protecting them against a life-threatening virus. We acknowledge that facilities have the difficult responsibility to protect the lives of residents and employees from COVID-19 while still allowing compassionate care access for family members.

House Bill 120 allows family members access to loved ones in long-term care facilities in compassionate care situations. These situations include, but are not limited to when a resident is struggling with the change in environment and lack of physical family support; grieving after a friend or family member has recently passed away; experiencing weight loss or dehydration and needing cueing and encouragement when eating or drinking; experiencing emotional distress from isolation as demonstrated by behavioral changes such as rarely speaking or crying more frequently; or the indication that a resident is approaching "End of Life". "End of Life" visits must include a requirement for the facility to permit at least two visitors per resident for a minimum of two hours.

Under the bill, long-term care facilities are required to develop and implement a visitation policy regulating compassionate care visits. Caregivers must meet certain health and safety requirements, including screening for COVID-19 symptoms and wearing personal protective equipment.

In addition, facilities are required to communicate the right of residents and families to contact the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. The bill also specifies that the facilities addressed in this legislation receive qualified civil immunity in accordance with HB 606 of the 133<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly.

Finally, this legislation is intended to clarify existing orders from the Ohio Department of Health and Federal guidance for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to ensure that families and residents have access to one another under compassionate care circumstances.

We have no known objections to the bill at this time.

Having a loved-one in isolation in long-term care facilities is a pressing and stressful issue facing many families throughout Ohio. Emotional health is critical to quality of life, and the lack of human interaction for long-term care facility residents has been devastating. Quite frankly, this bill is a matter of life and death. While we cannot measure the impact of loneliness and isolation with precise testing data, we certainly can see the change in the demeanor and behavior of long-term care residents. You will have the opportunity to hear from family members describing their experiences here in committee.

As I close, I ask you to consider what your life would be like if you were a resident in a facility? Would you want to see and interact with your family? Would you hope that someone would be your voice to help you in loneliness and lack of human interaction?

If your answer to any of these questions is “yes” then you most certainly want to support this bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony. I will be followed by my joint sponsor Representative Frazier.