

Hi my name is Lynn Meldon. I am a nurse and am married to an ER physician. So I understand the medical thought process behind the COVID precautions. However, I am here to speak to you today as the only child of a 95 year old woman who resides in an assisted living facility due to her beginning stages of dementia. One of my “selling” points to my mom about moving into an assisted living facility was that she wouldn’t be so socially isolated. Who would have guessed, 4 years later I would be socially isolated from her for a year officially tomorrow?

Currently, the frequency and length of any type of visit is ultimately decided by each individual nursing home/assisted living facilities. Sometimes it’s as infrequent as once every other week for anywhere from 20 to 30 minutes. Also, there may be an employee that must sit in on these visits to monitor. There is no privacy. And then most months, there are no visitations allowed at all.

Prior to COVID, at the minimum, I saw my mom weekly to take her to get her hair done and then we would go to Panera for lunch. This was “our” time. I miss physically being with her.

Since March 12th, 2020 I have been assigned 3 visits with my mom. The first visit occurred on July 15th for 30 minutes. It was an outdoor visit where I stood outside in the driveway and she was in the building and we were talking through a screened window. The second visit was July 29th, same outdoor visit as the 15th’s but this time was only for 20 minutes. The next time I was able to visit my mom wasn’t until October 14th which was the first indoor visit for 20 minutes. The indoor visit was the two of us in the same room, 6 ft apart and me wearing my mask. So I’ve seen my mom for a total of 70 minutes since March 12th in 2020.

I got my first visit of 2021 on March 3rd 20 minutes, 6 ft apart, me wearing my mask. I am grateful for these visits, but when HB 120 is passed, it will make a huge difference in her life and mine. I have already missed Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas and celebrating her 95th birthday which occurred in February of this year. At Christmas, when the staff told her she wouldn't be seeing me (I didn't have the heart to tell her) her response to them was "I have never not been with my family at Christmas. This is wrong". And yes, she is absolutely correct.

While my mom has a strong faith in God, I can hear in her voice she is sad as weeks have turned into months that she hasn't seen or been with me - with any type of consistency. Also, cognitively she seems to be slipping more. She didn't recognize me immediately, on the first and third visits of last year, even though the staff tells them about the "visit" but I did have a mask on. She's lost weight, and when I commented about it in the October indoor visit, her response was "Oh why bother to eat? I can't see you, go to church, or get my hair done. This Bill will allow me to go into her apartment and spend time with her — time that at 95, is so very, very precious.

I, and the other families, need HB 120 passed. For almost a full year, residents have felt abandoned and forgotten, life-long spouses have been separated, adult children with cognitive disorders have not seen a parent or sibling, dementia and Alzheimer's residents have lost memory of their loved ones, people have died alone, and families have lost what time remained with their loved ones who passed away in this last year. Family members provide the following for our loved ones: we can provide emotional support and companionship that they desperately need from their own families, not just the staff;

we can provide assistance with activities of daily living - encouraging eating and drinking;

we can preserve and promote quality of life for our loved ones;

and most importantly, no one should die alone, on a specific timetable with only two family members, IF allowed, around them. With the current visitation setup, none of these things are possible. And as caregivers we can do this safely - for all involved - staff, residents and our loved ones. We can get screened just like the staff does currently; we can wear PPE; we can monitor our own comings and goings when we are not at the facility.

Visiting family used to be like “the favorite child” in nursing homes/assisted living facilities prior to COVID. Everyone was glad to see us, happy we were there, encouraged to come often. We were part of celebrations in the lives of all the residents and sometimes staff. Since the lockdown, to the respective administrations of these facilities, it is like we were found out not to be the favorite children at all, in fact enemies who would cause harm to everyone. But we have not changed at all - just the perception has changed. We are not a liability, we are not the enemy - we are an asset.

We hear about COVID fatigue in the news and people are talking about it but how do the elderly feel? Not only have they not left their respective facilities but, they can't even see and spend time with their loved ones, other than for may be a 20 minute visit, 6 feet apart, where your daughter is wearing a mask with no consistency as to when we will be together again. The isolation is slowly killing them versus COVID - my mom is losing her sparkle, she's losing weight and she misses me. Has anyone asked our

loved ones what they want? I can tell you that if you would ask my mom, she would say I want to see and spend time with my daughter.

Please pass HB 120 to help not only myself, but my mom. This is about a compassionate visit. This is about companionship, assisting our loved ones, and helping out the respective staffs amongst these facilities. Thank you for your consideration and time. And also, I want to especially thank Representatives Richardson and Frazier, along with their staffs, for writing this Bill and their willingness to work with everyone to get this passed.

I leave you with this quote from Mother Teresa:

“I still think that the greatest suffering is being lonely, feeling unloved, just having no one.....that is the worst disease that any human being can ever experience.”