

March 9, 2021

To: Members of the Ohio House Families Aging and Human Services Committee

Re: Proponent Testimony for HB 12; The Compassionate Caregivers Act

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Yvonne Clutter from Gambier Ohio. I am writing to advocate for the passage of HB 120, the Compassionate Caregivers Act, having witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of Governor Dewine's Covid policies on my father and others like him who dwell confined in nursing facilities.

For a brief history, my father suffered a hemorrhagic stroke leaving him with speech deficits, pharyngeal paralysis (difficulty swallowing), as well as loss of function in right arm & leg. His recovery while slow, improved thanks to the hours of daily therapies provided by family and nursing home therapists. Despite many months, hopes remained high he'd recover enough to bring him home to live out his days.

On March 7, 2020 Governor Dewine sentenced my father to a prison of sorts where he remains today. Since the lockdown, he has lost much of the recovery gained. Like others, he has been relegated to visits via windows and doors using his old flip phone to communicate. You know – like they do in jails. However, between his progressive hearing loss and diminished speech abilities, conversations have become increasingly difficult. Dad even purchased a \$1500 communication device at the recommendation of a language therapist. But of course, no one was permitted inside to show him how to use it.

Even outdoor visits last summer with masking was more hindrance than help. Masks only enhance dad's speech deficit because he needs his good hand to shape his lips to form words. He also watches my lips. His mask, my mask and shouting over a "social distance" wasn't worth the effort for any type of outdoor encounter.

March 07, 2021 marked Day #365 since my father was "incarcerated" in his nursing facility due to the Governor's Covid mandates. Since that time, his health has declined significantly. New problems have occurred. These include:

- Seizures
- Increased language deficit
- His right arm and hand now in a contracture state from lack of daily exercise
- Weight gain due to lack of nutritional intervention which has escalated his diabetic health risk
- Difficulty with heart monitor transmissions

I'm sure you get the picture.

The nursing staff also admits without a doubt, the lack of cognitive stimulation and social interaction has caused him increased depression and high anxiety. It is so difficult for me to manage these concerns without being at his side **INSIDE**.

Indulge me for a minute and consider this:

Imagine yourself in the same room for days, weeks & months - the same four walls, a bed, a chair and a corner section dedicated to toilet and shower space. Throughout the day, your only human interaction is with masked overseers who bring you food. Human touch is by default when you are led to a common area.

Your overseers go home after their shifts. They interact with their families who have been everywhere – box stores, school, playing contact sports, church etc. The overseers themselves go shopping, dine out, and enjoy fellowship with friends. During holidays, they enjoy celebration with loved ones.

The overseers are governed by a “Health” agency with ties to the Head of State. The “Head of State” also enjoys fellowship of family, coworkers, contact sports that he approved, and touts science when convenient. He promotes medical trials using words like “vaccines” and “death” so you won’t resist.

The above describes Germany’s Spandau Prison of 1933 which became the predecessor to concentration camps built later on. It was a prison for political opponents of the “Head of State”. Persons were held in “protective custody” until their fate was determined. Disease & illnesses were propagated by guards who brought it from the outside. But the key here is the fact that family and clergy were not permitted to visit. Many died due to isolation.

I’m sure you get the connection by now, but let me be clear. The parallels are obvious. Since March 07, 2020, under the guise of “protecting the most vulnerable”, you have permitted Governor Dewine and the Ohio Dept of Health to place the elderly “in custody” without a thought for the consequences or a long-term plan as Covid restrictions increased. His so-called “protection” has resulted in nothing but epic failure.

Remember this important fact. While the Ohio Dept of Health sentenced the healthy general public to quarantine for POSSIBLE exposure to Covid, healthcare workers (which included nursing staff) were required to report to work even with known COVID exposure as long they displayed no symptoms. I know this because I am a healthcare worker. I was ordered to carry this ODH directive deeming me “essential” in my vehicle while lockdowns were in place and in case traffic was forbidden.

Understand – We are completely grateful for the outstanding dedication of staff who diligently sought to make our loved ones comfortable, warm & fed. But the seniors who died in nursing homes from Covid died from those permitted inside that were free to be outside. Add to this equation confinement and you have nothing less than a Spandau-type situation by proxy. The daily ebb & flow of staff increased my father’s vulnerability by as much as 500%. Tell me why this was and still is OK!

Thankfully there were NO elderly deaths from Covid at my father’s nursing home. **There was however an unprecedented CERTIFIED number of deaths from mental strife caused by loneliness and isolation.** The ban of family and clergy interaction is tantamount to the same unethical and inhumane treatment experienced by the 1933 Spandau prisoners. No doubt our Head of State and Ohio Dept of Health officials are criminally complicit in the cause of these tragedies.

While physical aspects of a prison are not mirrored here, the life approach to humanity is certainly comparable. Ohio's approach to the C-19 crisis under the direction of Governor Dewine, ODH and this legislature continue to deprive precious elderly people of their families' protection, deny oversight of their health status, overwork nursing home staff, intensify cognitive decline, and create enhanced depression & anxiety for themselves and their families.

There are a number of strategies that could and should have been implemented to avoid the disaster we now face. The families of our loved ones are acutely aware of their vulnerabilities thus we would never put them in harm's way. Nursing homes (my father's included) have had procedures in place to ensure workers did not bring covid-19 into their facilities. The same processes could have been implemented for visits by essential care partners months ago.

It's time that you the legislature and Governor Dewine recognize this fact: Our visits to our loved ones are not simply social calls. Neither should we their family members be deemed as "company". **We are as much and more essential caregivers and care monitors than those who are paid to be there.** Our involvement is vital, especially at facilities that are short-staffed. Caring families such as mine, ensure their loved ones eat well, communicate with the staff, certify their loved one's daily hygiene and most of all **support dignified engagement.** We are often the first to see changes in a loved one's condition or other issues. Even the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid recognize the resident's quality of care diminishes without regular interaction of family, clergy and visitors.

March 7, 2020 – 365 days and beyond that my father and other seniors like him are denied the right of their family's presence is criminal, negligent, malevolent and absolutely unconscionable. The success of lockdowns, masking, social distancing and vaccines remain questionable at best. Governor Dewine's latest carrot dangle of last week (50 cases per 100k persons) doesn't compute to near term access to our loved ones. **This is a state and national emergency.** We don't need Governor Dewine to treat us like a kid who if we behave might get to go out and play.

In regard to the state's promotion of vaccines: Many elders in my father's nursing home refused based on non-existent studies of long term effects in their age demographic. The letter I received from his facility included an insert from the CDC **stating that fact.** Still they (the CDC) "would appreciate my signature" to do a "real-world assessment" of the effect the vaccine "**might**" have on my father. Why would anyone support this Nazi-type experiment on the elderly? No studies, No facts, No Signature!! Permission denied. How frightening that Ohio's state government supports blind studies using our loved ones as lab rats.

In conclusion, you the legislature have a moral & ethical obligation to relieve the stress caused by the insane mandates of Governor Dewine which have gone too long unchecked. You in particular have taken an oath to support laws guaranteeing peace and safety of ALL Ohio citizens no matter the age. By the same token, it shouldn't take legislation to perform what already is my right to give and my dad's right to receive in terms of love and care.

With regard to HB 120, please consider amending it to include **ANY** essential caregiver that wishes to participate in their loved one's management. For my dad, permitting any family member to oversee the daily processes of his care is **HIS** right and **our** privilege – not just mine. Each of his three children can contribute unique and vital benefits to his person. My family and I long to once again assist with his meals, wipe clean his face, engage in daily therapies, teach him how to use his communication device, hold his hand, hug and satisfy his spiritual needs. **And** we want to perform these events in his room away from the din of a "community" or public room with availability to his person 24/7 without time restraints.

Prayers and hopes now depend on your willingness to intervene. My father will not be able to gain back what he lost during confinement nor will he realize full return to who he was prior to Covid. However passage of HB 120 could finally and forever resolve the plight of my dad and thousands of elderly across Ohio who have been literally incarcerated and discriminately left without dignity by Governor Dewine's Covid mandates.

In Summary:

Passage of HB 120 will restore vital and necessary access to our families – up close & personal.

Passage of HB 120 will permit **RIGHTFUL** caretakers to perform their duties and advocate on their loved one's behalf without hindrance.

Passage of HB 120 will provide basic human needs of love, companionship, touch and presence.

Passage of HB 120 will honor our loved ones' constitutional rights as free citizens as opposed to being treated as prisoners held at Ohio nursing facilities.

Passage of HB 120 will grant protection from mandates **contrary** to the health, safety and well-being of our loved ones.

Passage of HB 120 will most definitely **promote and restore** dignity as well as **rightfully reunite** our precious aged with their families.

Many thanks for allowing me the privilege to address what has become an intense burden for many. Special thanks to the Primary Sponsors of HB120, Representative Richardson and Representative Fraizer, for advocating on behalf of my father and our beloved Ohio families who anxiously await their loved ones presence and compassionate care.

Respectfully submitted,

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