



Advocating for Life, Faith, and Freedom in the Public Square

To: Members of the Ohio House Health Committee
From: Chris Long, President Ohio Christian Alliance
Re: Supporting Testimony H.B. 324

I would like to thank Chairman Lipps, Vice Chairman Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the Ohio House Health Committee for hearing our testimony today in support of H.B. 324, legislation that will assure the rights of patients to receive visitors, and for families and clergy to be able to visit and attend to the personal needs of those entering Ohio hospitals. H.B. 324 states, "A hospital shall permit in-person patient visitation in accordance with this section by the patient's family, caretakers, or clergy persons to the same extent as before the emergency was declared or disease prevalence increased." In addition, "No public health order issued under the named areas of the Revised Code to control the spread of a contagious disease shall restrict or prohibit in-person patient visitation in a hospital."

H.B. 324 addresses the concerns of both the patients and their visitors, as well as addressing the concerns of the medical facility. The bill's provisions ensure that hospitals may require visitors to sign a waiver of liability, require screenings for symptoms of disease, require PPE, and other reasonable safety precautions. But the hospital must allow the patient to receive visits from family, caretakers, and clergy.

Our office has received a number of calls from individuals seeking assistance as they were kept from seeing their loved ones during a time of a medical crisis over the past two years. In April of 2020 an OCA board member had a medical emergency and was rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery. Neither his wife, family, nor clergy were permitted to see him. This was early in the COVID-19 pandemic. But we still are receiving such reports. A few weeks ago, our office received a message about a Catholic priest who was called by the family to administer last rites to a parishioner who was near death. The priest was shocked when he was told by the hospital that he was not permitted to enter at that time and that he would have to wait until the patient had deteriorated further. The confusion that still abounds in Ohio's hospitals on this issue is troubling and unwarranted.

As Christians, we are compelled to minister to the sick and afflicted. Matthew 25:35-39 reads, 36. I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

37. Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?
38. And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?
39. And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'
40. And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Another important aspect of this legislation is that it assures that family members will be able to fulfill their roles as medical advocates. Patients who are already enduring medical and emotional trauma are sometimes not able to advocate for themselves. They need the help and support of family members to ensure that the medical staff is aware of their medical needs and wishes as a patient.

Because this hospital visitation problem in Ohio persists, we urge this committee to quickly pass H.B. 324 so that other Ohioans will not suffer the experience of isolation at a time of medical stress or emergency when they need the encouragement and care of family, friends, and clergy.

Thank you, Chairman Lipps, Vice Chairman Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the House Health Committee for hearing our testimony today in support of H.B. 324.