

Rep. Tracy Richardson
77 South High Street
13th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

March 2, 2021

Representative Richardson:

Today I am writing to you on behalf of my grandmother, Ruth Albright, a resident of Signature Healthcare of Chillicothe, and our extended family. We are now approaching the 1-year mark from when families of long-term care residents were told that they would be kept out of facilities for three weeks in order to 'flatten the curve'.

Grandma Ruth had her 96th birthday on November 17, 2020. As with all visits and family events over the last year, we had to celebrate this milestone with Grandma through a window. I'd like to tell you a little about the life my amazing grandmother has lived in her 96 years.

Ruth's mother died of tuberculosis when Ruth was just nine years old. She and her older siblings had to grow up fast in order to help their father keep the family together and raise their younger brother and sisters. Ruth left school just one year away from her high school graduation in order to care for two young nephews whose mother (Ruth's oldest sister) died from tuberculosis.

When she was twenty-one years old, Ruth got on a train in Chillicothe, Ohio, and traveled all the way to San Diego, California, to marry my grandfather, Rolland (Johnny) Albright. He was stationed at the Marine base there, and they wanted to be married before he was shipped to the South Pacific during World War II. Ruth always said she went to California by herself, but she wasn't alone on the trip back. She delivered her oldest son exactly nine months to the day from her wedding day.

Johnny made it through World War II and returned to Ohio where he and Ruth raised six children in a small house that didn't have running water, central heat, or an automatic washer and dryer. They raised their own food in an extensive garden and raised and butchered chickens and hogs.

Ruth lost Johnny to lung cancer in January, 1979. Ruth was fifty-five years old, not old enough for Social Security, and left with medical bills to pay for Johnny's hospitalization. She went to work doing housework and care giving for the elderly, and opened her home to her own elderly father.

Ruth lived on her own until just a few years ago when she became unsteady on her feet and had several falls and finally became unable to get around on her own. We were able to keep her at home for two years by family members staying with her and then using all of her resources to pay for help to stay with her 24/7. We made the difficult decision for her to move into the nursing home in January 2020. We assured her at the time that we would all be in to visit her frequently and would bring her home for family occasions.

Just two months later, we were denied entry to the nursing home. Every week since then, my mother (Ruth's daughter) has written letters to Grandma explaining why we weren't able to come to see her and reassuring her that we would be there just as soon as the nursing home would let us in. Recently, she has been telling Grandma that some of the family were starting to get the vaccine and that things would be better soon.

Little did we know that even after 80% of the residents in the nursing home (including Grandma) and an equal number of staff tested positive for COVID-19 and after all residents and staff who wanted vaccines got them, and after her family members were vaccinated, they would still be denied access to the nursing home because the administrator was waiting for direction from "Corporate" and the government to make a plan for visitation.

There is no logical reason to keep visitors who have been vaccinated from visiting with residents who have already survived COVID-19 and/or have already been vaccinated. My family & I have been following all the guidelines and requirements for the last year, all the while holding our breath and fearing the worst. My grandmother has experienced so much loss in her lifetime. She has lost her parents, her husband, all but one sibling, a son, a grandson, cousins, and all of her friends from her generation. She needs to stay connected to those of us that are still here for her but last March, she basically lost all of us in one fell swoop. Waving through a window and writing letters are no substitute for in person visits and true human connection.

We need swift delivery of updated, common sense guidelines to safely and strategically open up facilities, balancing vastly decreased risk from the virus with quality of life. You have the ability to end the isolation that has devastated lives in long-term care and reunite our families. We have all suffered long enough. It is time.

Sincerely,

Stacey L. McDonald
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Ruth, Johnny & their children (5 sons & 1 daughter)



Left-Grandma enjoying her first ride in a convertible. Right- Grandma in her happy place, holding 2 great-grandbabies.



Grandma during a recent 'window visit'.