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

To: Members of the Ohio Health Provider Services Committee  
From: Chris Long, President Ohio Christian Alliance  
Re: Proponent Testimony Sub. H.B. 236-10

I would like to thank Chairman Cutrona, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Health Provider Services Committee for hearing our testimony today in support of Sub. H.B. 236-10, legislation that will assure the rights of patients to receive visitors/advocates. Sub. H.B. 236-10 states, "The department of health shall create a 'Never Alone' information sheet that describes all of the duties, prohibitions, requirements, and rights established under section 3792.05 of the Revised Code, including the following: (a) That a congregate care setting is prohibited from denying a patient or resident access to an advocate except as provided in division (D)(2) or (E) of section 3792.05 of the Revised Code; (b) That a congregate care setting is prohibited from prohibiting a patient's or resident's advocate from being physically present with the patient or resident in the care setting except as provided in division (D)(2) or (E) of section 3792.05 of the Revised Code; Sub. H.B. 236-10 addresses the concerns of both the patients and their visitors, as well as addressing the concerns of the medical facility."

Our office received many calls from individuals seeking assistance as they were kept from seeing their loved ones during the COVID-19 shutdown over a nearly two-year period. 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 continued to receive reports for months from those who had been prevented from seeing their loved ones in Ohio's hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living centers. 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 abounded in Ohio's hospitals and nursing homes on this issue was 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.'

The shutdown policy that locked nursing home residents and those receiving medical care in our hospitals away from their loved ones persisted for months. The Ohio Christian Alliance issued a public appeal to Governor DeWine, urging the Governor to open up visitation so that Ohioans could care for and properly advocate for their loved ones in hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living centers. I have attached the letter as part of my testimony today. It was written in June of 2020. Two weeks later, Governor DeWine did announce a limited visitation plan for Ohio's nursing homes, assisted living centers, and hospitals.

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. This issue came close to home for me personally, as our youngest daughter was recently hospitalized with severe pain and a high fever. She was admitted for what was thought to be kidney stones at the time. For the first few days of her hospitalization, medical staff stumbled about, not knowing really what was wrong with our daughter. After more tests were conducted, a CT scan revealed shadowing in the lower spinal area and an MRI confirmed a large tumor. After much consultation by some of the medical members of our family with hospital staff, a course of action was carried out with careful advocacy. Our daughter had a 6-1/2 hour surgery to remove the tumor in her spine by a neurosurgeon. Her entire hospital stay, including rehab, was 21 days. She is 22 years of age and was never alone night or day in the hospital, as a family member was always with her. I can't imagine if this medical emergency had happened during the time of the COVID-19 shutdown - what would have been the end result? Members of my family had to advocate for one of the better neurosurgeons in the area to perform the very delicate and extensive surgery. Thankfully, the tumor was benign, and my daughter has recovered, is back to work, and getting on with her life. It underscores the importance of this legislation.

The Never Alone Act, Sub. H.B. 236-10, will assure Ohioans that they will have the care, encouragement, and advocacy of family, friends, and clergy during their time of medical treatment and nursing care, even during a time of national medical emergency. It is for that reason that we urge the Health Provider Services Committee to pass Sub. H.B. 236-10.

Thank you, Chairman Cutrona, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Health Provider Services Committee for hearing our testimony today in support of Sub. H.B. 236-10.



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The Honorable Mike DeWine  
Governor of the State of Ohio  
Riffe Center 30<sup>th</sup> Floor  
77 S High St  
Columbus, OH 43215-6117

Dear Governor DeWine,

June 5, 2020

I am writing you today concerning the COVID-19 shutdown policy for nursing homes and health care facilities. We are now entering the fourth month of a lockdown on nursing homes across the State of Ohio. Husbands, wives, children, and loved ones have not been able to go in and visit their family members in Ohio's nursing homes. Our elderly who deserve visits, care and the expression of respect from those who love them have been denied this since the order went into effect.

There are numerous heartbreaking stories of family members who were not able to be with their loved ones during their final days and hours on earth. This is cruel, and an unusual act of government policy. The untold sadness, sense of loss and remorse of those who were not able to pray with, care for, and simply just express their love to the ones they cherish before they left this life is something that I never thought we would see state government impose. The original intent of safeguarding our nursing home residents from the coronavirus may have been set forth with good intentions, and many Ohioans, including myself, thought this might be for a few weeks, but the duration of now going into 4 months with no plan for at least one family member going in to meet with their loved one is unacceptable.

We are receiving numerous reports that these residents in the nursing homes are becoming despondent, confused, and not eating. Their family advocates are not able to properly fulfill their roles in helping to oversee the health care needs of their loved ones in Ohio nursing homes; the order forbids them from entering the facilities to observe what health care workers may or may not be doing to care for their loved ones.

My own mother has dementia, and I have not been able to see her since February in-person. She does not understand why we cannot come in to see her, and I can tell that she feels as if we do not care; every time we see her through the window it breaks our hearts. I never thought I would live to see the day that a government would keep me from fulfilling one of the commands of God to "honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the earth." Exodus 20:12

My mother lived through the Great Depression in hard poverty, then WWII, then raised her family and served others. She and so many like her deserve better. Governor, I urge you in the strongest terms – allow family members to meet with their loved ones in Ohio’s nursing homes.

The goodwill and patience of Ohioans who have been waiting to hear from your office about a plan that would allow for visitation while safeguarding the residents has expired. We long thought that by now an announcement would have been forthcoming, but the reality is, these seniors are wasting away in loneliness and a sense of imprisonment. They committed no crime, yet they are serving a punishment from a draconian order of government that is keeping them from family and friends.

Even the incarcerated in Ohio’s prisons for the worst types of crimes are entitled to visitors, but our elderly, some of the greatest generation, are being forced into seclusion without their consent. We urge you in the strongest terms, appealing to your good will and judgement, that the time has come to set forth a plan to allow for family and loved ones to visit their beloved family members in Ohio’s nursing homes.

Sincerely,  
Chris Long  
President of Ohio Christian Alliance