

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, and Members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for hearing my support testimony for HB 236 The "Never Alone Act".

My father had moved into a new nursing home shortly before the lockdown of 2020. He was alone and confused. With the end date of the pandemic unknown, I was terrified that he would die before I had a chance to hug him goodbye. My sisters and I took turns calling him each day, but sometimes the nurse still refused to put him on the phone for fear of adding germs to the phone receiver. We also wanted to visit him regularly to make sure there were no signs of elder abuse, but we could not accurately observe his health without contact with him (his mask was usually heavily soiled, though, so I am not convinced he had great care much of the time). I still visited regularly through a window, sneaking my hand through the broken screen when possible so he could feel my touch. On Christmas morning, we woke up early and drove forty minutes each way to window visit with him even before my little kids opened their gifts, shivering outside his window for 15 minutes since we weren't allowed to go in. I cried frozen tears, but I couldn't bear the thought of not seeing him on Christmas.

It was about a year in total before we were allowed to hug again, and even then varying restrictions came and went, so we never knew how much contact we would be able to have with him. I am so grateful that he did not die during that time, though I am very embittered that I lost a year of true bonding with him; by the time my young children were able to visit with their papa again, his decline was much more noticeable. I am overwhelmed with sadness to think of all the hugs we missed, the walks around the facility we couldn't take, the true interaction we couldn't have during that year when his mind and body were more able. The lockdown restrictions stole from me one of the final years with our dad/grandpa. May no one have to suffer alone like that again.

I urge the committee to vote YES on HB 236.

Rachel Cain
concerned citizen, daughter, mother, wife, and friend