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Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 236, "The Never Alone Act." My name is Sandy Enderby; I have been a nurse for over 17 years and have had many opportunities in my career to work within the senior community. Currently, I serve as the Executive Director of the Ashland County Council on Aging. Our agency is a part of the Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging, which serves North Central Ohio. We aim to provide community-based services to those sixty years and older in Ashland County. We provide services to assist our senior citizens in remaining safe, healthy, active, and independent in their homes for as long as possible. The agency also serves as the advocate voice for our senior population. I am here today to give written testimony in support of House Bill 236, "Never Alone Act."

I can attest as a nursing professional that this bill is crucial for the well-being of our senior population in a congregate care setting. House Bill 236 will assist patient-focused care by allowing an emotional support advocate to the patient or resident if they request it. My written testimony shows that patient-focused care is meaningful and valuable, especially in the senior population. It uses a holistic approach, considering the person's social, emotional, and spiritual needs. In my experience, this approach has been shown to improve the patient's condition and reduce anxiety and stress in both patients and family members. As a nurse who has worked in a long-term care setting, I believe it is always encouraged and beneficial in the recovery process of the patient or resident to have the presence of family or friends daily. I fully support House Bill 236, which allows a designee to advocate or be an emotional or spiritual support person for the patient or resident in a congregate setting. It will preserve and protect our senior citizens during complicated, stressful, and often final life stages.

On a personal level, I would like to testify on behalf of my family and share our struggles and frustrations when we were denied visitation for my mother in an assisted living community. Mom was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2019. We had no other choice but to admit her into a memory care facility. My brother and I visited her daily. We would take turns having lunch or dinner with her, and we would often sit with her in the evening and watch her favorite game show on TV. However, in 2020, due to the mandates related to COVID-19, we were restricted from having contact with her. This sudden change in our routine and the subsequent decline in my mother's health was a source of immense frustration and heartache for our family. At first, it had to be in an outdoor setting, with masks and distance, and eventually, we were prohibited from any personal contact.

Over the next several months, we noticed a significant decline in my Mom's mood; she had become depressed from isolation and struggled to remember who we were. She couldn't understand why we had to stand outside her apartment window to talk. Why did a nurse have to be in the room during our

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visit, or why did we have such little time to visit? On numerous occasions, when my Mom was transported to the hospital for treatment of dehydration and fever, we were unable to be at her bedside in the emergency room. As you can imagine, for an 80-year-old with dementia, surrounded by strangers in an unfamiliar place, it was very stressful and scary. As her disease progressed, her health continued to decline, and her days were limited; I decided to take a leave of absence from work and move my mother out of the nursing facility and into my home so that she would have her family at her side during her last days on this earth. I was fortunate to have the ability to provide care for my mother and had an employer who would allow me the time off work to do that. There are so many others who didn't have that option. Many people passed away without a loved one holding their hand or sitting at their bedside during the final hours on this earth. In closing, House Bill 236 will ensure that any patient or resident will have someone by their side during the most vulnerable time in their lives.

I urge the committee to vote yes on House Bill 236

Thank you again, Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee for this opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 236.

Sincerely,

Sandy Enderby
Executive Director
Ashland County Council on Aging

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