



December 3, 2024

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson and Members of the Senate Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today concerning HB 236, The Enact Never Alone Act.

First, I would like to express the support of over 400 independent Baptist pastors and churches for this bill to pass. For two years pastors and church members in the Buckeye State were stripped of the rights guaranteed by the Ohio Constitution. Article I, Section 7 states, in part, "nor shall any interference with the rights of conscience be permitted."

Bible-believing Christians are commanded to visit the sick. One of the most sacred duties of a pastor is to visit those in his congregation and provide spiritual care – especially those who are in need. I cannot think of a more appropriate descriptor than "advocate" of someone who seeks to minister to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of another individual. To forbid assistance to the sick is, indeed, an interference with the rights of conscience.

I am still dealing with church members who were not given the closure they needed during the Covid emergency order. And to be honest, I am one of them.

Although I have more, I will give just two examples of why this bill has, unfortunately, become necessary for the citizens of Ohio.

My own parents' health had declined to the point where we found it necessary to move them from their home a few states away into our own. After a couple years, they preferred to have a place of their own, so we found them another place to live within five minutes from our home. Since neither of them could drive, my wife and I were their primary source of transportation. For nearly six years, I took my dad to his monthly doctor visits, various tests, and, eventually his appointments with the clinic to check the efficacy of his blood thinners. Eventually I was needed to attend those visits because he was becoming quite forgetful. He also became blind and needed even more advocacy from my mother and me.

In September 2020, he was hospitalized in the Columbus area with acute breathing problems. Although he never once tested positive for Covid-19, the hospital would only allow one family member to be designated as the sole permanent visitor. This was not simply one family member at a time – but one family member only. Ever. Although I had assisted him for years, I could not forbid his wife of over 60 years to visit her husband. Through the next 2 ½ weeks, this blind, confused patient kept pulling off his oxygen mask. On one occasion, my mother called me on her phone and I was able to tell Dad that he needed to leave his oxygen mask alone – otherwise he will continue to become weaker. The nurses called me on two other occasions when he was especially agitated and he stopped pulling on his mask for awhile. The nurses needed my assistance but I was still not permitted to visit.

Let me pause for a moment and give some background. In 2020, I had been visiting church members in various hospitals for thirty-eight years – sometimes 3-5 different patients or hospitals per day. I know when to adroitly leave the room during pre-surgery or post-op as health care officials ask personal questions. I realize clearly that



the requirements of doctors, nurses and others are much more immediate than my visit. It has now been forty-two years of pastoral care and I understand how to cooperate and respect hospital staff and their concerns. My father taught me this. He was a pastor, too, for nearly 60 years. When I was in college during the late '70's he took me with him on many hospital visits and explained the proper way to conduct yourself as a pastor while visiting in hospitals.

So, while he was lying in a hospital bed, many hours alone because my mother didn't have the strength to visit all day – he was asking why no one from the church had come to visit him. His son was his pastor, and his grandson was his assistant pastor – yet we couldn't attend.

I attempted to find relief everywhere. The Director's office for Mt. Carmel Health Care, the Administrator's Office for St. Anne's Hospital, Governor DeWine's office, Interim Director Lance Himes' office – all to none avail.

After nearly three weeks, my father's condition had deteriorated enough to where it was necessary to be placed on hospice. At this point, he was moved down one floor, in the same building, in the same hospital, where we would walk down the same corridors – but now he could receive two visitors at a time, as many visitors who wished to come, and they could stay as long as they wished to stay.

He had a couple semi-lucid moments during those final three days. But after six years of doctor visits, hospitalized stays, pre and post surgery times, blood-thinner appointments, and much more – the last alert conversation I had with my father was with him repeatedly asking me why I had never come to visit him.

That is only one of many, many stories of dealing with unjust restrictions

In August of 2021, two senior citizens in our church, a dear, sweet church couple, contracted Covid-19. Although they were in a different hospital system than my father was, Ohio Health did not treat their patients with much more compassion, either. Only two people were permitted to be designated as visitors, and both of their adult daughters lived out of state. While the husband was in one room, his wife was in another room just down the hallway. Although I was in town, I was not permitted to visit.

One day in September they were informed that their condition was fatal and since they had years earlier signed a DNR, the husband decided that the hospital should remove their oxygen masks. Fortunately, the hospital called me and said now I was permitted to visit, although I had less than an hour to get there. It was impossible for their daughters to make it from out of state. His wife's bed was moved into his room and although she was seldom alert, they both said their goodbyes to each other. The two daughters begged to say their goodbyes, so their loving sister-in-law used an iPad to Facetime one daughter and I used my phone to Facetime the other.

I have not had many bizarre moments in my life like those 45 minutes when putting the phone to each person's face so their children could tell their parents they loved them and wished they were there to kiss them and hold their hands. "Miss Kitty," as she affectionately was called, stepped into eternity to be with her Saviour, while her husband, Jack, miraculously recovered. He since has joined his wife and is home with His Lord.

These scenes, and countless others, can never again be permitted in what is supposed to be a civilized society.



Personally and professionally, I, along with tens of thousands of our church members, exhort this committee to support the passage of this bill, for it to pass overwhelmingly on the Senate floor and that Governor DeWine would promptly sign this HB 236 into law.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dan L. Wolvin".

Pastor Daniel L. Wolvin
State Director