

## Testimony of a Daughter Affected by COVID-19

A friend sent me the email explaining HB 770, the Essential Caregivers Act. I am so glad that this is being introduced. It is sorely needed at this time.

I know this personally, as both of my parents by necessity were moved into assisted living early in 2020. For most of this time, our family has been denied visitation. The sadness and anxiety that this has caused our family is impossible to put into words.

Throughout his life, my father had been a vigorous, independent, and athletic man. Even in December of 2019, he was still (safely) driving; picking up his granddaughter from school was part of his daily activities. In addition to this, he was caring for my mother, who had been suffering from progressive dementia.

In January 2020, my father's normally robust health took a turn. My father's sudden deterioration in health, combined with my mother's progressive dementia meant that my sisters and I needed to act quickly so they would have the care they needed. We moved them into assisted living on Jan. 31, 2020. On Feb. 10, 2020, my sister took my father to a doctor. He was complaining of a sinus infection; we thought all he needed was antibiotics. Instead, the doctor told us that my dad needed to go to the emergency room immediately. My father was diagnosed with pneumonia and congestive heart failure. Because of his prognosis, he qualified for hospice.

Keep in mind that throughout my adult life, I was very close to my parents. I saw them almost every day, and we were very good friends. My dad was very kind, gentle and congenial. Every time I visited, he said, "Come back soon!"

Then March 12, 2020 came. They locked the front doors and we could not get in. My parents were not even permitted to open their windows. Seven weeks into this hideous situation, the hospice nurse called and said we could get in to see my dad on a limited basis. She felt he was going to pass away soon. We had to get special permission for my younger sister and me to go in together for moral support. I thought we would be able to continue visiting after this, but I was mistaken. Each person was only allowed one visit.

At this point, my dad was unable to help my mother the way he had for years. She began wandering the halls at night and attempted to leave the facility. We got a call that she would have to move to memory care, and my dad would have to move to the critical care building next door. We told them they could not be separated because they had been married for 65 years.

They accommodated us by moving them both to the memory care at the end of April. We were not allowed in to help with the move. The staff handed us their furniture and personal items through a window. We did not even know where my parents were that day.

When visiting, my sisters and I had to talk to them through a closed window by cell phone. We were simply not allowed in. My parent's lack of ability with modern technology made face/time and zoom calls difficult. Also my father had a severe hearing loss, incurred during his service in the Korean War, which further hampered the situation.

My sister and I got in another time one week before he passed away on Sun., May 3. It was due to a kind and understanding nurse who let us in for a few hours. I felt obligated to keep this a secret, as I felt she could be fired if someone found out.

The next day I inquired again about getting in. They said someone had gotten sick, although with no confirmation that it was COVID. Nonetheless, the facility was locked down again.

This denial of access continued until Sunday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, Mother's Day. At 9:00 AM, the staff called to inform us that our father was dying. After multiple and lengthy entreaties with the staff, we were finally permitted to see him.

By the time we were allowed in, my father was unable to speak, and just lay in his bed. I told him they would not let us in. He nodded that he understood.

He died soon afterwards.

I truly believe that my dad would have lived longer if we could have gotten in to see him. I think it was unbearable for him not to see any of us. I personally feel it was unconscionable.

Now we are in a similar situation with my mother. She was in a memory care facility, and they would only allow window visits. She became very confused and agitated when we were outside of the window with masks on. These "visits" were clearly not helpful for my mother.

I am a professional performing musician and teacher. I was able to convince the staff to allow me on a weekly basis to bring a portable keyboard to the back patio, and play songs outside for my mother and the other residents. My mom, the residents, and the staff loved it. Moreover, the musical stimulation seemed very beneficial for my mother. Music had been plentiful in our home while growing up. It seemed to calm her and give her a sense of peace.

On Fri., Nov. 13, my mother was discovered unconscious on the floor. She was rushed to the hospital where she had to have emergency surgery to remove an acute bowel blockage and have a colonoscopy procedure. I was not allowed into the hospital because only one person was allowed in, and my sister was already there.

Given the staffing limitation at this (or any) assisted living facility, and the lack of ongoing family contact and communication, I have to wonder if my mother's deteriorating condition (and obvious changed in bladder and bowel habits) had gone overlooked. I will assert the strong likelihood that my mother's emergency surgery and colonoscopy could have been avoided by regular visits and communication with her family.

How many other Ohio citizens and families may be in the same situation?

My mother was in the hospital for five days and my sisters and I decided that I would be the designated visitor. I stayed in her room as much as possible, and was even allowed to spend two nights overnight in the room with her.

Now she is at a critical care center, and none of us are allowed inside. There isn't even a window to look in and see her. She is in quarantine for two weeks. The only allowed visits are at a closed window. These visits were disastrous for my mother. The way things are going I'm assuming I will not see my mother in person until the weather breaks in the spring. Perhaps at that time, I can start playing the keyboard outside on their patio again.

Or perhaps not.

These evolving situations have changed my life and my perspectives. I am now very aware of how our rights can be taken away at any time. This legislation is necessary and extremely important. Thank you so much for introducing it. I have not been sure what to do and this is an excellent start!

Thank you.

Ann Gilbert