

November 25, 2020

Dear Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Members of the House, and Members of the House Aging and Long-Term Care Committee

Thank you so very much for your efforts to ease the burden that Covid-19 has placed upon our loved ones in assisted living situations. It is much appreciated, as no one could have imagined how long the effects of this virus would have lasted.

I would like to introduce you to an amazing, strong, beautiful and determined woman, my Mom, Marjorie Fitzgerald. Mom is 93 years old and until about a year and a half ago lived in the family home she shared with my Dad (whom we lost in 2010) since 1955. She unfortunately had a series of falls, which resulted in a broken hip and a fractured back. She amazingly healed physically from these, but with advancing dementia, the high risk of future falls and chronic arthritis, the doctors strongly advised she would not be safe living alone. I was hopeful she would agree to share our home with my husband and I, but she said, "I really appreciate it, but you have your lives and I want my independence." We were so blessed to be able to obtain a new one- bedroom apartment for her at Crescent Crossing at Bethany Village in Centerville, OH. This is a special place, as her lifelong church, Hope Lutheran Church in Dayton, OH, supported and helped establish Bethany Village back in the 1950s and her mother was on the establishing board.

Mom has been on lockdown since March 12, 2020. She has not been permitted to leave Crescent Crossing and we have been unable to enter her apartment. Initially we were only able to communicate with her by phone, face-time, or talk to her by phone in the parking lot (her apartment window overlooks it). Eventually we were permitted once weekly outside visits. We were separated by a glass (changed to screening due to hearing difficulty) partition. At least we could see her and that was nice, but these visits were restricted to three people only and were one half hour in length. The masks we all wore made it difficult for Mom to know what we were saying, but it was nice to be outdoors together, and Mom looked forward to these visits. Unfortunately when the Covid-19 numbers spiked in our county, we were restricted to visits where we were outside under a tent, and Mom was in a lobby area inside the facility, communicating by phone.

It has been so difficult not to be able to visit Mom in her apartment. We cannot share afternoons together talking and reminiscing. We are unable to watch TV together, play cards, look at photos, and most importantly, just visit. It is hard to know what supplies she may need, or help her out with small repairs, or cleaning. The isolation has most definitely added to my Mom's confusion, short- term memory loss and dementia.

The staff at Bethany has been fantastic. Not only do they go "above and beyond" communicating with us, but are so kind to deliver things to Mom from the family and they often take the time to just sit and visit with her. This lockdown has created a burden for them as well. If I could help ease some of that by being able to assist Mom in her apartment, that would be another positive impact of this bill.

For a family member to be able to visit her in her apartment on a regular basis would be life changing and restore some of the joy and happiness to her life. It is not my intention to be selfish or put anyone at greater risk. It would be important that all necessary safety precautions are observed and protocols established by this committee and each individual facility be conscientiously followed.

I feel strongly it is past time to look at the balance between physical safety and mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. This is particularly important to our elderly loved ones who have given so much of themselves, and have already had their lives altered due to physical or mental challenges. To be able to have a personal and physical presence with some sense of normalcy through face-to-face visits in a familiar environment would be therapeutic and beneficial.

Again thank you all so very much for your willingness to explore options during these trying and unprecedented times. You are representing our loved ones in a most meaningful way and providing hope to many.

Most Sincerely,

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