

Proponent Testimony for House Bill 770 (Richardson, Frazier)



*Debra A. Studer
Interim HealthCare
December 3, 2020*

Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Howse, and Members of the House Aging and Long Term Care Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 770 *Permitting Essential Caregivers to Enter Long-Term Care Facilities during COVID-19 (Richardson, Frazier)*. My name is Debra A. Studer and I am the Administrator for Interim HealthCare of Newark. We provide Home Health Services in Representative Frazier's district and hosted him in our Newark office.

Interim HealthCare provides the full continuum of Home Care Services, Home Health, Palliative Care, Hospice, Private Duty Nursing, Pediatrics and Passport Services. We provide Nursing, Therapies, Home Health Aides, Personal Care Aids and Homemakers. Our franchise covers 70 offices in 5 states, 33 of those offices located in Ohio.

COVID -19 has impacted our business in all aspects, from obtaining Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to the fear from clients of individuals coming into their homes. We have invested in education and training for our staff and for our clients to alleviate concerns they may have. The reality is that if we can keep them at home and care for them, our Hospitals and Skilled Nursing Facilities can be reserved for those who need them the most. Many of these individuals can safely be taken care of at home.

Assisted Living Facilities (ALF) are the actual residence of many of the individuals we serve. Home Health provides nursing, physical therapy (PT), occupational therapy (OT) speech and language pathology (ST), (master of social work) MSW and home health aides (HHAs) to many clients within these facilities. As Medicare Certified Agencies, we can provide the skilled services these residents cannot receive from many of the ALF's due to licensure. Services such as infusion care, wound care, wound vacs, lab draws, PICC line dressing changes, chemotherapy administration, catheter changes, physical therapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy.

As we are currently denied access in many of these facilities, these services cannot be provided, which pushes them back into the hospital or SNF for this type of care. Home Health can provide these services while maintaining them in the home of their choice and reducing their risk for COVID.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has identified Home Health as an essential service and supports these individuals remaining in their home of their choice.

We have a number of scenarios where we have been denied access to our existing patients in these facilities and have a number of family members concerned about the responsibility of taking their family member out of the facility for a Foley Catheter change, a lab draw from a PICC line or for wound care. The individuals are at a higher risk every time they are taken out of the facility for these services. These individuals are entitled to receive these services in their "home" from Home Health, through Medicare and Medicaid. Home Health must meet the same criteria the facility does related to PPE and safety.

On Behalf of Interim Healthcare, we support HB-770, which would permit essential caregivers to enter long-term care facilities to provide care and support to a resident in a facility and would establish criteria for those visits during the COVID-19 state of emergency. We also are in support of the inclusion of the amendment that would:

1. *New Language in Section 1(A) to include a definition for “essential health care workers”*—a definition of “essential health care workers” should be included to specify that the bill covers health care workers who are not employees of the facility. This definition should include ORC definitions for home health and hospice workers.
2. *New Language in Section 1(H) to prohibit facilities from denying access to “essential health care workers”*—language should state “The long-term care facility shall not deny access of essential health care workers designated to serve a resident of the long-term care facility, so long as they pass the screening requirements in the same manner as facility staff.”
3. *New language in Section 1(I) to enforce language in Section 1(H)*—language should state “Any long-term care facility that prohibits entry of essential health care workers as specified in Section 1(H) of this bill may be reported to the Ohio Department of Health for investigation.”

We commend Representative Richardson and Representative Fraizer for introducing this important piece of legislation. We hope that this bill will allow for our agencies to be granted access to a facility where they can continue to care for their patients, and ensure that individuals are receiving their home health care. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (740) 349-8700.