

11/25/2020

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

I am writing to you on behalf of my mother who lives in an assisted living facility in Cleveland, Ohio. For the last two and a half years, I visited with her on a daily basis, providing companionship, along with emotional, psychological and physical support.

Since March 2020, I have not been allowed to visit with my mother inside her apartment. My mother who is 96 yrs old thrives on visits from family members who have provided her with love and compassion throughout her life. These aspects of life are critical to a persons well being, especially during these unprecedented times.

The facility has allowed indoor and outdoor 1/2 hour visits in common rooms, as well as doctor visits and limited outdoor activities. With the surge in the virus, visits in common rooms and outings are restricted again. Every time there is a surge or case at the facility the residents lives are impacted. As a result, my mother and other residents face isolation and loneliness, in addition to other health problems that did not exist prior to the reduced visitation. Staff members cannot provide our loved ones with psychological, spiritual and emotional health they need.

The current regulations are extreme measures that deprive residents of their freedom and living life at the fullest. This is not sustainable for my mother or others living at the facility. We must show our humanity for those that live in facilities by allowing designated individuals to have regular contact in their loved ones apartment, before significant changes in their health occurs.

Reuniting families can be done safely and without difficulty by designating one person per resident. Now with more known about the virus, an "all or nothing" approach is no longer necessary. Like staff members who come and go everyday, a designated family member can wear proper PPE and visit on a daily basis, taking all necessary precautions, entering the building with a temperature check and biweekly test, going directly to their loved ones apartment.

No one should doubt the negative impact these present regulations have on those that live in assisted living facilities. The isolation and limited contact with loved ones has a cascading effect on the well being of residents. It brings the last years of their life to an end, much sooner than it should be. Through cooperation of the facility and both parties, residents who do not have a lot of years left can spend precious time with their family member.

Thank you for your consideration and support of House Bill 770, the Essential Caregivers Act.

Pamela Heller