



Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 770

State Representative Tracy Richardson, District 86

House Aging and Long-Term Care Committee

December 3rd, 2020

Thank you Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Howse, and members of the Aging and Long Term Care Committee for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 770. I stand before you today on behalf of many distraught Ohioans. Specifically, I'm referring to our constituents residing in long term care facilities and also their beloved family members longing to see them. Both are suffering from restrictions placed upon them during this COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of House Bill 770 is to allow compassionate and life-giving interaction between residents of long-term care facilities and their designated "essential caregiver" or alternate "essential caregiver".

The vision for the bill began when a resident of my district reached out to me with concern about government policy. Her business includes daily contact with senior citizens via phone calls and email outreach. She came to me overwhelmed that the government was preventing life-giving contact with loved ones due to COVID-19 mandates. My constituent described the depression, weight loss, decrease in cognitive function, and loss of will to live on the part of residents in long-term care facilities. Additionally, she explained that these conditions were and are exasperated by the helplessness expressed by family members wanting to impact the quality of life of their loved ones in residence. After learning about these compelling issues, I knew we had to do something.

The problem statement became, "How do we ensure family members have safe and necessary access to residents of long-term care facilities during the COVID-19 emergency? How do we balance life giving and vital access to residents while protecting them against a life-threatening virus?"

In working on this challenge, we acknowledge that facilities have the difficult responsibility to protect the lives of residents and employees from COVID-19 while still allowing compassionate care access for family members.

Thoughtfully, we looked to policy in other states and to experts for help and advice.

House Bill 770 allows essential caregivers to provide care and support to a long-term care facility resident during the COVID-19 state of emergency. Under the bill, a long-term care facility resident or legal representative may appoint one essential caregiver and one alternate essential caregiver to provide important care and support services. It requires the resident to consult with faculty staff when designating the essential care giver to ensure the residents' wishes are addressed.

To protect and preserve the health of residents and employees, House Bill 770 requires long term care facilities to develop and implement an essential caregiver visitation policy. The policy will include the following precautions: signing in upon arrival at the facility's single-point entry, screening of essential caregivers for COVID-19 symptoms in the same manner as facility staff, wearing of personal protective equipment, maintaining social distancing with other residents and staff, regularly sanitizing, limiting movement throughout the facility, and restricting contact with other individuals when outside of the facility.

House Bill 770 also clarifies that long-term care facilities in the bill are included in the temporary qualified civil immunities in House Bill 606, which will be effective on December 12.

The effective period of House Bill 770 is through December 31, 2021 or the termination of the COVID-19 state of emergency, whichever is sooner.

Having a loved-one in isolation in long-term care facilities is a pressing and stressful issue facing many families throughout Ohio. Emotional health is critical to quality of life, and the lack of human connection for long-term care facility residents has been devastating. Quite frankly, this bill is a matter of life and death. While we cannot measure the impact of loneliness and isolation with precise testing data, we certainly can see the change in the demeanor and behavior of long-term care residents. You will have the opportunity to hear from family members describing their experiences here in committee.

As I close, I ask you to consider what your life would be like if you were a resident in a facility? Would you want to see and interact with your family or designated caregiver? Would you hope that someone would be your voice to help you in loneliness and lack of human interaction? Would you want the right to choose how you spend perhaps your last months of life without the government denying you access to your loved ones?

If you were a family member of a resident in one of these facilities, would you want to provide compassionate care to your loved one suffering from loneliness, depression and lack of human interaction in this health crisis? If your answer to any of these questions is "yes" then you most certainly want to support this bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony. I will be followed by my joint sponsor Representative Frazier.