

Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Howse, and members of the House Aging and Long-Term Care Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony as a proponent of House Bill 770, the essential caregivers act.

My name is Ericca Harrison, I am 46 years old, and I reside in South Amherst, Oh in Lorain County. I have been married to my husband, Sean, for 20 years. I live with our 14-year old daughter, Bobbie.

My 52-year-old husband suffered a debilitating stroke in February of 2019. Unfortunately, he was left severely disabled, requiring 24-hour care. He currently resides in a long-term care facility in Lagrange, Oh. Since the emergence of COVID-19, I have been permitted to see him a handful of times for restricted outside visits. Prior to visitation restrictions, I was heavily involved in his everyday physical care along with providing love and emotional support as he learns to live in this new reality. Reminding him daily that I am still here, and always will be-no matter what is extremely important to him and myself. The emotional toll brought about from being separated from each other is indescribable. His physical health has also declined since the quarantine. He has lost a significant amount of weight and has experienced worsening chronic dysphagia ultimately resulting in placement of a feeding tube. I was forced to make this decision without any objective evidence. I was given the task of making a life-changing decision based on the assessment of his caregivers alone. He has also exhibited signs of depression and loneliness manifested in behaviors such as refusing to get out of bed and a decline in verbal communication which was already compromised due to the stroke.

I would like to briefly describe the outside visits. I take my place in the chair that is placed on the blue tape X. Sean's aid wheels him out and places him at his X on the concrete. He instinctively reaches out for a hug. I remind him "six feet babe, air hugs". We do our air hugs, and he sits back in his wheelchair with a defeated look on his face. It is torture. During one such visit, his favorite aid came along and walked up to say hi. He reached out for a hug and she instinctively obliged. He looked so happy. He got comfort from her, which I am grateful for, but it should be me. This 52-year old man who must come to terms with the fact that he will be severely disabled, living in a nursing home for the rest of his life, is not allowed to hug his wife. For 8 months now. Now that the weather is cold, the outside visits are exchanged for FaceTime calls. These weekly calls are very difficult as he is nonverbal and visually impaired.

Human beings can not thrive in isolation. Now you take a person who is already compromised mentally or physically and isolate them from their loved ones, they not only do not thrive, but they also decline. I am ICU nurse. I fully grasp the devastation of contracting COVID-19. But I am confident that the protocols thoughtfully outlined in HB 770 will keep our residents safe from the virus while providing them with the essential human contact with their love ones.

I want to conclude by stating that the integrity of the facility is not in question. Keystone Pointe Health and Rehabilitation has done a fantastic job in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. I am extremely pleased with the care Sean has received, but nothing can substitute the care, love, and support provided by a loved one. I thank you for your time in considering HB 770 and plead with you to vote in favor.

Thank you,

Ericca Harrison