

March 30, 2022

To: Senate Health Committee

Re: Proponent Testimony for HB 120; The Compassionate Caregivers Act

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Yvonne Clutter from Gambier Ohio. I am writing to advocate for the passage of HB 120, the Compassionate Caregivers Act, having witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of Governor Dewine's Covid policies on my father and others like him who dwell in nursing facilities.

For a brief history, my father suffered a hemorrhagic stroke in September 2019 leaving him with speech deficits, pharyngeal paralysis (difficulty swallowing), as well as right arm & leg function loss. His recovery while slow, improved thanks to the hours of daily therapies provided by family and nursing home therapists. Despite many months of recovery, hopes remained high he'd improve enough to bring him home to live out his days.

Then in March 2020, Governor Dewine issued his covid response including lockdowns of all nursing facilities. He said it would be for a short time –one of many lies. Like others, dad was relegated to visits via windows and doors using his old flip phone to communicate. You know – like they do in jails. However, between his progressive hearing loss and diminished speech abilities, conversations became increasingly difficult. Dad even purchased a \$1500 communication device at the recommendation of his language therapist. But no one was permitted inside to show him how to use it.

In short, due to Governor Dewine's Covid mandates, my father was sentenced to a prison of sorts and "incarcerated" at his nursing facility. As a result, his health declined significantly. New problems occurred. These included:

- Seizures
- Increased language deficit
- Permanent contracture of right arm and leg due to lack of daily exercise
- Weight gain due to lack of nutritional intervention which escalated his diabetic health risk

I'm sure you get the picture.

What outdoor visits permitted during the summer of 2020 with masking was also more hindrance than help. Masks only enhanced dad's speech deficit because he needed his good hand to shape his lips to form words. He also watched my lips. His mask, my mask and shouting over a "social distance" wasn't worth the effort for any type of outdoor encounter.

The nursing staff also admitted to our family that without a doubt, the lack of cognitive stimulation and social interaction caused him increased depression and high anxiety. It was very difficult for me to manage these concerns without being at his side INSIDE.

Indulge me for a minute and consider this:

Imagine yourself in the same room for days, weeks & months - the same four walls, a bed, a chair and a corner section dedicated to toilet and shower space. Throughout the day, your only human interaction is with masked overseers who bring you food. Human touch is by default when you are led to a common area.

Your overseers go home after their shifts. They interact with their families who have been everywhere – box stores, school, playing contact sports, church etc. The overseers themselves go shopping, dine out, and enjoy fellowship with friends. During holidays, they enjoy celebration with loved ones.

The overseers are governed by a “Health” agency with ties to the Head of State. The “Head of State” also enjoys fellowship of family, coworkers, contact sports that he approved, and touts science when convenient. He promotes medical trials using words like “vaccines” and “death” so you won’t resist.

The above describes Germany’s Spandau Prison of 1933 which became the predecessor to Nazi concentration camps built later. It was a prison for political opponents of the “Head of State”. Persons were held in “protective custody” until their fate was determined. Disease & illnesses were propagated by guards who brought it from the outside. Family and clergy were not permitted to visit. Many died due to isolation.

I’m sure you get the connection by now, but let me be clear. The parallels are obvious. While jail cells of a prison are not present here, the life approach to humanity is certainly comparable. Ohio’s approach to the C-19 crisis under the direction of Governor Dewine, ODH and this legislature deprived precious elderly people of their families’ protection, denied oversight of their health status, overworked nursing home staff, intensified cognitive decline, and created enhanced depression & anxiety for themselves and their families.

Since March 2020, under the guise of “protecting the most vulnerable”, you the legislatures permitted Governor Dewine and the Ohio Dept of Health to place the elderly “in custody” without a thought for the consequences or a long-term plan as Covid cases increased. Instead random restrictions increased. Dewine’s so-called “protection” resulted in nothing but epic failure.

Understand – We are completely grateful for the outstanding dedication of nursing staff who diligently sought to make our loved ones comfortable, warm & fed. But the seniors who died in Ohio nursing homes from Covid died from those permitted inside that were free to be outside. Add to this equation confinement and you have nothing less than a Spandau-type situation by proxy. The daily ebb & flow of staff increased my father’s vulnerability by as much as 500%. Tell me why this was OK!

Thankfully there were NO elderly deaths from Covid at my father’s nursing home. **There was however an unprecedented CERTIFIED number of deaths from mental strife caused by loneliness and isolation.** The ban of family and clergy interaction is tantamount to the same unethical and inhumane treatment experienced by the 1933 Spandau prisoners. No doubt our Head of State the Governor and Ohio Dept of Health officials are criminally complicit in the cause of these tragedies.

Another important fact: While the Ohio Dept. of Health currently sentences the healthy general public to quarantine for POSSIBLE exposure to Covid, healthcare workers are required to report to work even with known COVID exposure as long they display no symptoms. I know this because I am a healthcare worker. In the early days of the Covid hysteria, I was even ordered to carry an ODH directive deeming me “essential” in my vehicle when lockdowns were in place and in case traffic was forbidden.

Upside down approaches to Covid continue to be implemented against our most vulnerable that are geared more toward politics than science. However there are a number of strategies that could and should have been implemented to avoid the disaster we now face. The families of our loved ones are acutely aware of their vulnerabilities thus we would never put them in harm’s way. Many Ohio nursing homes had procedures in place to ensure workers did not bring covid-19 into their facilities. The same processes could have been implemented across Ohio to ensure family care and interaction months ago.

It’s time that you the legislature and Governor Dewine recognize this fact: Visits to our loved ones are not simply social calls. Neither should we their family members be deemed as “company”.

We are as much and more essential caregivers and care monitors than those who are paid to be there. Our involvement is vital, especially at facilities that are short-staffed. Caring families such as mine, ensure their loved ones eat well, communicate with the staff, tend to their loved one’s daily hygiene and most of all support dignified engagement. We are often the first to see changes their condition or note other issues. Even the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid recognize the resident’s quality of care diminishes without regular interaction of family, clergy and visitors.

March 7, 2020 was a day of infamy for the elderly. The days, weeks, months & now years my father and other seniors like him are denied the right of their family’s presence is criminal, negligent, malevolent and absolutely unconscionable. The success of lockdowns, masking, social distancing and vaccines policies have now been debunked. Governor Dewine’s phony goals (i.e. 50 cases per 100k persons, color-coded maps etc.) also didn’t compute when granting access to our loved ones. We don’t need Governor Dewine to treat the public like a kid who if we behave might get to go out and play.

With regard to ODH & Dewine’s promotion of vaccines: In 2020, the patients in my father’s nursing home were given a letter regarding vaccine availability. It included an insert from the CDC stating studies of long term effects in their age demographic were non-existent. Still they (the CDC) “would appreciate my signature” to do a “real-world assessment” of the effect the vaccine “might” have on my father. Thankfully many refused!! Why would anyone support this Nazi-type experiment on the elderly? No studies, No facts, No Signature!! Permission denied. How frightening that Ohio’s state government supported blind studies using our loved ones as lab rats.

In conclusion, you the legislature have a moral & ethical obligation to relieve the stress caused by the insane mandates of Governor Dewine which went too long unchecked. You in particular have taken an oath to support laws guaranteeing peace and safety of ALL Ohio citizens no matter the age. By the same token, it shouldn’t take legislation to perform what already is our right to give and our loved one’s right to receive in terms of love and care. **Thus the fate of Ohio’s elderly remains a state and national emergency.**

HB 120 while late in the game is a game-changer. Its language includes **ANY** essential caregiver that wishes to participate in their loved one's management may do so. I would also like to see this legislation broadened to include any future epidemic. We WANT to assist with meals, wipe clean a face, engage in daily therapies, teach them how to use their communication device, hold their hand, hug and satisfy their spiritual needs. **And** we want availability to them 24/7 without restraints now and forever. It is **THEIR** right to have their family journey with them at this time and **our** privilege to do so.

My father's story concludes with this note: March 23, 2021 marked Day #382 of dad's incarceration. On that day however due to his decline, my family was finally permitted access to him without restriction thanks to the Director of Nursing's permission. At 6:50 pm that evening, my father's eyes lit up to see his family standing before him in his private room without a "guard" to ensure the protocols of Covid (masks, social distancing etc) were observed. We held his hand, hugged & kissed his worn cheeks (door closed – mask & social distancing rule IGNORED). For 21 days, we tended to him what we could. Sadly he died April 13, 2021 at 6:50 pm – exactly to the minute, three weeks later. The lost time with him cannot be recouped of course but for others who remain in nursing facilities, it's not too late.

Prayers and hopes now depend on your willingness to intervene. Passage of HB 120 could finally and forever resolve the plight of thousands of elderly across Ohio who have been literally incarcerated and discriminately left without voice by Governor Dewine's Covid mandates.

In Summary:

Passage of HB 120 will restore vital and necessary access to our families – up close & personal.

Passage of HB 120 will permit RIGHTFUL caretakers to perform their duties and advocate on their loved one's behalf without hindrance.

Passage of HB 120 will provide basic human needs of love, companionship, touch and presence.

Passage of HB 120 will honor our loved ones' constitutional rights as free citizens as opposed to being treated as prisoners held at Ohio nursing facilities.

Passage of HB 120 will grant protection from mandates **contrary** to the health, safety and well-being of our loved ones.

Passage of HB 120 will most definitely **promote and restore** dignity as well as **rightfully reunite** our precious aged with their families.

Many thanks for allowing me the privilege to address what has become an intense burden for many. Special thanks to the Primary Sponsors of HB120 and Representative Richardson for advocating on behalf of my father and our beloved Ohio families.

Respectfully submitted,

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