

3/30/2022

Compassionate Caregivers Act HB 120

Dear Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health Committee,

I am writing to you on behalf of my mother who lives in an assisted living facility in the state of Ohio. This testimony to the Committee is based on what occurred during the Covid pandemic, when there was an ongoing inability for me to attend to my mother's needs in her apartment. The testimony was for the Essential Caregivers Act, dated 3/8/2021.

For the last three years, I visited with my mother on a daily basis, providing companionship, along with emotional, psychological and physical support. For over a year, I was not allowed to visit with my mother inside her apartment. The regulations imposed on the resident and their families are extreme measures that deprive residents of their freedom, care and living life at the fullest. The situation had presented problems in a multitude of ways, and it is apparent that the facility and staff cannot provide what our family has provided for my mother for many years.

When my mother had recovered from Covid and was back at her apartment for several weeks. I was allowed ONE 1/2 hour Compassionate Care visit after she returned from a two week stay at the hospital. Due to the circumstances of my mother not being able to be alone, we had to hire 24/7 private aides at an exorbitant cost to my mother and our family.

Over the course of a week there were five different aides, a physical therapist, occupational therapist, staff RA's, and nurses who would come and go. But there was one person who could not be with my mother. That was her own daughter.
How does this make any sense?

How is it possible for me to access my mother in 1/2 hour? How can she be expected to recover without my support or that of her family? How can the staff members be expected to spend time with her or offer her love, care and compassion to the degree that I would? Why should anyone let alone a 96 yr old person have to endure Covid and a hospital stay, then endure being alone only under the care of staff or private aides? Why can't her own daughter be allowed to attend to her mother's needs in her apartment?

A most recent example has surfaced that was not anticipated. Since she returned to her apartment I learned that she was unable to get into her own bed, could not lift her legs, and was unable to get up from a chair she has used for the last three years. The weakness from Covid, the hospital stay, and one year of other changes that occurred, clearly sheds light on a very dire situation. Having my own eyes on my mother and seeing how capable she is functioning in her apartment is critical. These restrictions are 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. I know that I am very careful with whom I come into contact with and will wear the necessary PPE while inside my mother's apartment.

Reuniting families could have been done safely and without difficulty now that we know more about how the virus is spread. There doesn't have to be an "all or nothing" approach. Like staff members who come and go every day, 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 the Covid regulations had on those residents who reside in assisted living facilities, as well as their families. The isolation and limited contact with loved ones had a cascading effect on the wellbeing of residents. It brought the last years of their life to an end, much sooner than it should have. Through cooperation of the facility and both parties, residents who did not have a lot of years left could have spent precious time with their family members.

Please, all facilities must learn from the harsh measures that were in place during the Covid pandemic. Rules should be adjusted and adapted to reflect the knowledge and tools we have now.

Thank you for your consideration and support of Compassionate Caregivers Act HB 120.

Pamela Heller