

Senate Committee Hearing 3/30/22 for HB120

Hi my name is Lynn Meldon. I am a nurse and am married to an ER physician. So I understand the medical thought process behind the COVID precautions we put in place these past 2 years. However, I am here to speak to you today as the only child of a now 96 year old woman who resides in an assisted living facility due to her beginning stages of dementia. One of my “selling” points to my mom about moving into her facility in 2017 was that she wouldn’t be socially isolated. Who would have thought that I would have been isolated from her for months with no end in sight?

On March 12th, 2020 the world changed for my mom and I, like it did for all of us. No more visits inside her apartment, no church, no taking her out to Panera, going for drives or for routine doctor appointments. When I was finally allowed to see my mom, it didn’t occur until July 15th for 30 minutes. It was an outdoor visit where I stood outside in the driveway and she was in the building and we were talking through a screened window. The second visit was July 29th, same outdoor visit as the 15th’s but this time was only for 20 minutes. My mom’s facility then stopped these “visits” due to an increase in COVID numbers in the county, not the facility. The next time I was able to visit my mom wasn’t until October 14th which was the first indoor visit for 20 minutes. The indoor visit was the two of us in the same room, 6 ft apart and me wearing my mask. So for a year between March 12th, 2020 and March 2nd, 2021, I saw my mother for a total of 90 minutes.

While my mom has a strong faith in God, but as the weeks turned into months, I could hear in her voice she was sad - she hadn’t seen or been with me - with any type of consistency. Also, cognitively she seemed to be slipping more. She didn’t recognize

me immediately, at my first assigned visit in July of 2020, even though the staff tells them about the “visit”, but I did have a mask on and there was a screen in the window. She also didn’t immediately recognize me in our October 2020 visit. I noticed she had lost weight and when I commented about it, her response was “Oh why bother to eat? I can’t see you, go to church, or get my hair done:”. House Bill 120 will allow me to go into her apartment and spend time with her — time that at 95, or whatever age, is so very, very precious.

So to recap, between March 12, 2020 and March 3rd, 2021, my mom and I missed being together for Easter, Mother’s Day, my birthday, Thanksgiving, Christmas and celebrating her 95th birthday which occurred in February of 2021. At Christmas, when the staff told her she wouldn’t be seeing me (I didn’t have the heart to tell her) her response to them was “I have never not been with my family at Christmas. This is wrong”. And yes, she is absolutely correct.

Visitation began to change a bit in March 2021. My first visit was on March 3rd, for 20 minutes, 6 ft apart, me wearing my mask. Subsequently, I was assigned weekly 20 minute indoor visits from March until May. Finally, on May 2nd, **415 days** since I last step foot in her apartment and she physically left the building, both occurred. I took her for a drive in the Metroparks, windows down for some fresh air and we got some ice cream. She said it was the best day she’d had in a very long time.

As the pandemic went on, I and others in my same situation, saw a need as we watched our loved ones, like my mom and my mother-in-law, lose contact with the world, their families and friends. The isolation was as harmful as the risk of catching the

virus was. My mom had lost her sparkle, she lost 14 pounds and she missed me. We basically, in order to protect them, protected some of this population to death.

We must realize the critical role family members play in the care & well-being of residents in long-term care facilities. These residents suffered untold emotional, psychological and physical pain as a result of the separation. Far too many lost their will to survive - they were failing to thrive. Denying residents' right to visitation is not preventative of a disease, but simply imprisonment.

Family members provide the following for our loved ones during a compassionate care visit: we can provide emotional support and companionship that they desperately need from their own families, not the staff;

we can provide assistance with activities of daily living;

we can preserve and promote quality of life for our loved ones;

and most importantly, no one should die alone, on a specific timetable with only two family members at their bedside, IF allowed. And as caregivers we can do this safely - for all involved - staff, residents and our loved ones. We can get screened just like the staff does currently; we can wear PPE; we can monitor our own comings and goings when we are not at the facility.

I, and the other families, need HB 120 passed so if there is another pandemic, appropriate precautions will be in place. This is about companionship, assisting our loved ones, and helping out the respective staffs amongst these facilities. And to show what a difference this makes, my mom is now getting out, getting her hair done weekly, she's gained her sparkle back, along with the 14 lbs she lost!

Thank you for your consideration and time. And I want to especially thank Representatives Richardson and Frazier, along with their staffs, for writing this Bill and their willingness to work with everyone to get this passed.

I leave you with this quote from Mother Teresa:

“I still think that the greatest suffering is being lonely, feeling unloved, just having no one.....that is the worst disease that any human being can ever experience.”