



Office of the
State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

**Proponent Testimony Sub House Bill 120
Senate Health Committee
April 6, 2022**

Thank you, Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, and members of the Senate Health Committee for your consideration of Substitute House Bill 120 and for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the Compassionate Caregivers Act.

The mission of the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is to advocate for excellence in long-term services and supports wherever consumers live. As the COVID-19 pandemic hit long-term care facilities and visitation was curtailed, Ohio's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program worked diligently to ensure that residents had access to their loved ones through whatever method was available to them at the time. We saw visits conducted virtually using iPads or phones, window visits, outdoor visits, and supervised visits in facility dining halls. In-person end of life visits were quickly recognized by the administration as critically important early on and we were relieved when even broader compassionate care visits were included in the state public health orders and CMS guidance so that residents who were experiencing distress or physical decline could have family and friends visit them for comfort.

I would like to extend our appreciation to the sponsors of House Bill 120 for including input from the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program into the latest substitute version of the bill (-7) and support your consideration of the bill to ensure residents in long-term care facilities have access to uninterrupted compassionate caregivers in the future.

As we've seen over the last two years, the impact of isolation on residents is extremely difficult for families, staff, and residents. The Compassionate Caregivers Act recognizes that visits by supportive family and friends can ease the pain of separation and promote better physical and mental health of residents. Families and staff reported to us that residents were lonely, tearful, withdrawn, and confused during the worst of the visitation restrictions. This was especially true for those residents who have dementia and other cognitive and mental conditions, who experienced intensified reactions to this major change in their lives. Many complaints to the ombudsman program were driven by these concerns and were reflective of families' desperation at being separated from their loved ones.

The role of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program in educating residents and their loved ones about the opportunity for compassionate care visits is critical. H.B. 120 identifies the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman as a resource to both to the facility staff and the residents in ensuring the

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“maximum access to the resident” when a compassionate care visit is needed. Our Office stands ready to assist to make these visits happen.

H.B. 120 will clarify how and when compassionate care visits are appropriate and that residents and their loved ones will be provided a copy of the facility policy outlining the opportunity to arrange a compassionate care visit. Family and resident schedules will be accommodated so visits are not limited by staff convenience. We appreciate the inclusion of section (E) clearly stating that policies developed in response to the Compassionate Caregiver Act shall be the “least restrictive” and provide “maximum access to the resident.” We will hold facilities to that language.

I believe that everyone who has been through the COVID-19 pandemic fully recognizes the importance of compassionate care visits and would fight to ensure they continue throughout a resurgence of COVID-19 infections or a new pandemic. Placing this language into the Ohio Revised Code ensures that these provisions are available in the future long after those of us with firsthand experience with a pandemic are gone so future generations do not have to learn these hard lessons again.