

March 29, 2021

In Support for S.B. No. 303,

Relating to restriction on residents and patients rights to visitation

Dear Chairman Hilderbrand and Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee Members,

I am writing today to support S.B. 303, specifically the restrictions on residents and patients rights to visitation. My mother, Eulala Dade, 93, currently resides in a long term care facility in Olathe Kansas, Johnson County. In March 2020, the local and federal government completely restricted all visitations to the facility that my mother resides in. This began a year long struggle to see my mother that caused irreparable harm to both my mother and me. Before the restrictions were in place, I was an essential caregiver to my mother, taking her to all doctors' appointment, making her favorite foods to eat, doing laundry and assisting with personal grooming. I was an almost daily presence in her care. The staff at the care facility and I worked together to make my mothers life as fulfilling as possible. If there were any problems, I was there to observe and help facilitate any resolutions before they became detrimental to her health and wellbeing.

Due to this isolation and visitation restriction, I was unable to see the signs of decline in my mother's condition. My mother has lost over 20 pounds this past year now she is just skin and bones. I was not able to see that she had been barely eating for months. She has lost almost all muscle and is extremely weak due sitting in her chair or her bed for days on end with no socialization. The television was her only companion for days on end. The isolation also caused her dementia to progress to the point where she has extreme difficulty holding a conversation. Her macular degeneration is now permanent due to the restrictions not only in visitation but not allowing medical appointments as well. My mother is deaf and has a cochlear implant to help her hear, although it is still extremely difficult for her to hear with technology- i.e. ipad, phones, etc or with background noise-i.e. a busy dining room. There was a point were she said she would rather die than continue being isolated from her family. Her family is her life and by denying access to her family, her quality of life has deteriorated substantially.

While I understand that the restrictions were put in place to protect the residents initially, the isolation has caused irreparable damage to my mother that cannot be undone. This visitation restriction was to keep residents from dying but succeeded in only keeping them alive, while preventing them from actually living a meaningful life. What is life while you are suffering 24 hours a day-7days a week in a 4 ft x 4 ft space with little to no contact with your family, one of the reasons you are living. These restrictions did not keep any infections diseases out of the facilities, as the staff members brought it in. It only succeeded in the decline of the quality of life for the residents, who bear the full consequences of a decision they had no choice in.

I support the right for residents to waive, in writing, any restrictions imposed to control or prevent the transmission of an infectious disease by the county, a city within such county, an employee of such county or any federal or state agency at any time, including during a state of local disaster emergency declared pursuant to K.S.A. 48-932, and amendments thereto, or state of disaster emergency declared pursuant to K.S.A. 48-924, and amendments thereto.

I believe that living a fulfilling life includes the things that give your life meaning, passion and enrichment. This includes your family, especially in the case of a daily caregiver. By denying visitation, it is my belief a basic and fundamental human right has been violated. The only way we can make sure that history does not repeat itself is to learn from these mistakes and enact legislation that will enable future generations to ability to live full fulfilling lives, making their own choices. This is a vital step in ensuring that families will be recognized as a asset to a residents quality of life by developing policies that will support the mental and physical health of all residents and patients.

Please consider supporting S.B. 303, as future generations of long term care as well as patients and elderly deserve to live their lives knowing that they will have the support of their families, especially in challenging times.

Thank you for this opportunity.

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