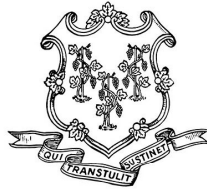


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**State of Connecticut**  
**SENATE**

**SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER PRO TEMPORE**

**RANKING MEMBER**  
ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE  
EXEC. & LEGIS. NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

**MEMBER**  
FINANCE, REVENUE & BONDING COMMITTEE

Testimony

Aging Committee Public Hearing

March 9, 2021

*In Support of Portions of Senate Bill 975, House Bill 6552*

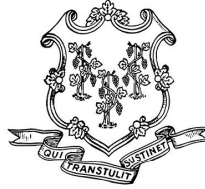
Chairs Miller and Phipps, Ranking Members Kelly and Wilson, and distinguished members of the Aging Committee, I am Sen. Paul Formica and I am submitting testimony in support of the provisions of Senate Bill No 975 that seek to prevent the social isolation of senior citizens who reside in nursing homes and respect their rights to family contact and privacy. I also support the provisions of House Bill No 6552 to improve access to virtual connections between long-term care facility residents and family members.

I appreciate the Committee raising these bills which contain many provisions lawmakers from both sides of the aisle have proposed and advocated for in various bill proposals submitted to the Committee this year.

As a member of the Governor's Nursing Home and Assisted Living Facility Oversight Advisory Working Group (NHALOWG), I have a much closer view of the incredible challenges these facility residents are facing, plus the numerous interactions I have had with family members of senior constituents.

I am extremely supportive of efforts to protect long-term care facility residents' rights to treat their living quarters as their homes and have the same rights as all other state residents, including the right to use technology of their choice for virtual visitation and if needed to file grievances for violations of their rights. The effects of this pandemic have been devastating for Connecticut's oldest residents – both physically and emotionally.

Connecticut failed in its response to COVID-19 in our nursing homes and long-term care facilities in the spring of 2020. Connecticut's response was third worst in the nation for



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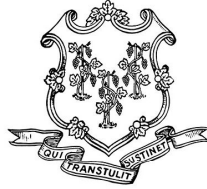
percentage of deaths in nursing homes, with our average death rate nearly double the national average. Our state also failed to protect residents' rights to access and interact with their family members – the eyes and ears of vulnerable elderly individuals. Isolation of seniors in nursing homes and at home led to further decline in wellbeing and poorer health outcomes. The Mathematica report was an indictment on the administration's response and confirmed that the isolation of seniors was a significant problem for overall health, well-being and survival.

In the early days of the pandemic, nursing home residents were terrorized by the situation they faced. They were kept in their rooms scared and isolated from family, surrounded by illness and death, without even an opportunity to walk outside for a breath of fresh air for months. Access to virtual technology to connect with their loved ones was limited for far too many. Since the pandemic slowed, visitation and virtual access increased, but those with mobility issues and technology issues have always been at a disadvantage.

We must make sure that the terror nursing home residents faced in the early days of the pandemic never occurs again. Increasing access to virtual connections and preventing future social isolation are key to protecting the most vulnerable.

While many of the measures the Governor took throughout the pandemic were well intentioned, some in regard to our nursing homes did not acknowledge the resulting damage and the risk residents experience as a result of isolation. Some of these effects are just as damaging to a person's wellbeing as the COVID-19 virus itself, speeding up decline, diminishing capacity, and negatively impacting other aspects of personal health. The virus was not the only threat seniors in nursing homes faced. Social isolation, lack of exercise and mobility also substantially contribute to poor outcomes. In this process residents' dignity and human rights must not be abridged, including the right to quality health care, fresh air and family interaction. We need a focus on patients and people.

As I stated earlier, family members and loved ones are the “eyes and ears” of elderly individuals, especially persons suffering from Alzheimer's disease or dementia. As Quinnipiac University professor Nicholas R. Nicholson Jr. has been reporting for years, social isolation is a serious problem with older adults, strong correlations exist between social isolation and negative health consequences (2009), and older adults experiencing social isolation are at increased risk for numerous negative health outcomes, including depressive symptoms, decreased quality of life,



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and cardiovascular disease (2013). In addition, AARP Research found in 2018 that at the time Medicare spent approximately \$134 more for each socially isolated older adult per month than it would if the person were connected, speaking to the impact of isolation on health and wellness.

Far too many loved ones in our nursing homes lost their lives to COVID-19. We also cannot ignore the impact continued social isolation had on the death toll and the health and wellbeing of vulnerable nursing home residents. I appreciate this Committee taking these issues seriously and working together on solutions.

Thank you for your continued support,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Formica", written over a large, light-colored oval scribble.

Paul M. Formica  
State Senator, 20<sup>th</sup> district