

Dear Members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Sharon Echtman and I am from Deep River. I would like to express my support for an Act Concerning Long-Term Care Facilities S. B. 1030, particularly sections 9 and 10. This bill will help Essential Caregivers to give the extra care to their loved ones as they did before the pandemic.

An Essential Caregiver is not a general visitor. These individuals meet an essential need for the resident by assisting with activities of daily living or positively influencing the behavior of the resident. The goal of such a designation is to help ensure residents to continue to receive individualized care. They are free help for the facilities as they are so understaffed.

This issue has personally impacted me and my family. My husband is in a LTCF. He was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's and is legally blind. Joe, with assistance, was walking on his own, able to use the bathroom, could carry on a conversation and could feed himself independently with little help. I was given permission by the nursing home that I could walk him in the hallway with another person so he could get exercise. He was only in this facility that he called home for 5 months before COVID struck, but he settled in nicely and was comfortable there. He knew I would always be a steady presence there as I had promised him. We have been married for 45 years and were never apart one day until the pandemic. I would go in everyday to feed him his meals, groom him and walk with him. I would play music for him for entertainment since the recreation dept. in his facility does not offer much for people who are vision impaired. I would take him out to lunch, go for car rides, visit family, etc. Our family were constant visitors there not only for Joe but for all the other residents who had no family.

On March 9, 2020 we had a beautiful visit at our daughter's home. Little did we know that would be the last time we would see Joe the way he was on that day.

Then Covid struck and everything came to a halt. Joe became extremely depressed and lonely, he wasn't eating (lost 30+) pounds, he was put on Xanax and Seroquel for his behavioral issues. He became a Hoier lift patient. He was forever calling out my name and COULD NOT understand why he was there all alone and why wasn't I there??? He was so scared!!! One day he told me he would rather die than to live like the way he was living! Skype and closed window visits with a mask on did not for Joe.

I begged the Administrator to let me in to see my husband - into the dining room where there was a door I could have entered and exited without going through the facility. I offered to wear a hazmat suit if I could just come in. That never happened.

If I had been allowed in from the beginning, this would have made EVERYONE'S lives easier. My husband would still be walking, would be able to use the bathroom, he would not have had such a significant weight loss and would NOT have needed any medications for behavioral issues. THIS COULD HAVE ALL BEEN PREVENTED! The damage is already done and there is no turning back but moving forward lets take what we have learned and make some positive changes.

I understand this pandemic was new to everybody and safety measures were put into place. I must ask "Were they really safe?" Keeping families out did NOT keep Covid out. Precious lives were still being lost due to failure to thrive.

Families have suffered enough - we need to be better prepared for the future and NEVER should our loved ones be left alone to be traumatized!

The Residents Bill of Rights were violated and must be restored to their full capacity.

I believe this new legislation will not only have a positive impact on my family but other families as well.

I thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will join me in supporting this bill.

Sincerely,  
Sharon Echtman