



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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March 25, 2021 * 9:00am * Zoom

Testimony on **Raised HB 6634 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SUPPORT PERSONS AND A STATE-WIDE VISITATION POLICY FOR LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES.**

Dear Chairmen Moore and Abercrombie, Ranking Members Berthel and Case, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on **Raised HB 6634 AN ACT CONCERNING ESSENTIAL SUPPORT PERSONS AND A STATEWIDE VISITATION POLICY FOR LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES.**

My name is Kathleen McCarty and I am the State Representative for Waterford and a portion of Montville. In my view, the establishment of an essential caregiver (support persons) program in our nursing homes and assisted living facilities may be one of the most important pieces of legislation to come out of this session.

The horrific COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc, misery and death on our nursing home residents beginning last spring. It is absolutely devastating to realize that over 3,800 nursing home residents died during the pandemic. The trauma that has been inflicted upon the families of these residents is long-lasting and some of it might have been avoided had we had an essential caregiver program in place in our state.

While we have learned a lot about the virus since the beginning of the pandemic, related to mitigation strategies, the proper use of PPE, infection control, testing, staffing, we have not learned enough about how to care for the social and emotional well-being of our nursing home residents during a prolonged period of isolation from family caregivers.

To this day, some nursing home facilities are barring or limiting visits from family members who pre-pandemic were caregivers to the nursing home residents. There is truly an abundance of literature,

including the Mathematica Report that points out that the social and emotional well-being of the resident is as important as the physical well-being of the resident.

In fact, the prolonged period of absence from visitors and loved ones during the pandemic resulted in increased depression, loneliness, suicidal ideation, loss of weight and energy and even the will to live for untold numbers of residents.

We as a legislature can and MUST do better. Establishing an essential caregiver program in our state will bring extra comfort, protection and care to our nursing home residents on an on going basis. An essential caregiver program is recommended in the Mathematica Report, *“The state should work with facilities to designate essential caregivers (family members and private duty aides) hired by the family who have increased access to Long Term Care facilities.”*

There is certainly a way to balance the safety, health, and well-being of our long-term residents with the allowance of essential caregivers into long-term care facilities even during a public health emergency. Essential caregivers may be defined as: persons who have been given consent by the resident or his/her representative to provide services or assistance with activities of daily living to help maintain or improve the quality of care or quality of life for a facility resident. Section 1 of **HB 6634** adds that the support should include assistance with activities of daily living and physical, emotional, psychological and socialization support of the resident. (lines 9-10)

An Essential Caregiver Program should be formally established in Connecticut with appropriate guidelines and policy. *A long term care facility resident, or a resident representative, may designate an essential support person and a secondary essential support person who may visit the resident despite general visitation restrictions imposed on other visitors, provided the essential support person or secondary essential support person complies with any rules promulgated by the Commissioner of Public Health....(lines 24-29)*

With all due respect the rules that were promulgated by the Commissioner of Public Health during the pandemic are actually the reason for this legislative proposal. While it is important to have a state-wide visitation policy it is equally important to establish a separate policy for essential caregivers who should not be considered as visitors. An essential caregiver is not a visitor and must be treated in the same fashion as staff adhering to all of the same safety protocols as staff in long-term facilities.

While the bill talks about essential support persons, I prefer and believe essential caregiver is the more accurate description so I have used that term throughout this testimony. As long as the role and importance of caregiver is not altered or diminished the language is acceptable. It must be stressed again however that an essential caregiver is not a visitor.

It has been a true honor for me to serve on the Nursing Home and Assisted Living Oversight Working Group since the Fall of 2020 and specifically on the subcommittee, *Socialization, Visitation and Caregiver Engagement*. which centered on the role of caregivers, visitation, and the social emotional needs of our nursing home and assisted living residents.

The social and emotional care of our nursing home residents has been a top priority of mine since I became a member of the Connecticut General Assembly. In my view, the establishment of an essential

caregiver program is absolutely necessary for meeting the needs of the whole person and for the protection and safety of residents in long-term facilities.

I would like to recognize the support that the Long-Term Care Ombudsman, Mairead Painter, the Chief Executive Officer of the Connecticut Association of Health Care, Matt Barrett and the President of Leading Age, Mag Morelli, have given for the establishment of an Essential Caregiver Program in Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathleen M. McCarty". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Kathleen M. McCarty
State Representative, 38th District
Waterford, Montville