



## Testimony of Lorrie Van Akkeren

### SB 795 - Oversight Committee on Quality Care in Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities – Membership and Cochairs

#### Position: Unfavorable

Voices for Quality Care was formed by some people who were very passionate about the needs for advocacy and improvement in the quality of care residents in nursing homes received. The scope of their work has expanded over the years to include assisted living.

Voices for Quality Care is a long-time member of the Oversight Committee for the Quality of Care in Nursing Homes and Assisted Living facilities. Our organization feels that it is essential to reform and maintain a consumer perspective in the big business of long-term care. This bill, SB 795, does not make that industry better.

First, let's consider the reason the Oversight Committee for the Quality of Care in Nursing Homes and Assisted Living was established. It was established because there was a need to hear the voices of the residents, their family members, and their family members who were caregivers. These people were and are today so overwhelmed with the needs of their loved in one of these residence situations, that they have no time to express their observations and needs until the situations become desperate. (I know this firsthand; I spent 15 years as a caregiver of someone in a nursing home.) By having predominantly, consumer-oriented groups represented on an oversight committee filled a huge gap so these voices could be heard.

The pandemic has created many new problems in Maryland, but it has also heightened the importance of other issues. Amidst a pandemic where—as of March 9<sup>th</sup>—over eight percent of Maryland's COVID-19 cases have been in long-term care facilities, and 44 percent of our deaths have been in long-term care facilities, we need consistent oversight – especially considering the chronic underfunding of our state's Office of Health Care Quality, who is amidst a multi-year plan to add staff to meet their requirements that they have long failed to do.

**This legislation, however, is not the answer. We do not need to add another industry seat to an Oversight Committee for industry; they and their viewpoint are overwhelmingly represented. The consumer voice is not. We cannot have an industry representative potentially chairing an OVERSIGHT committee. And while I appreciate the point about vacancies—I looked—and we actually have over 80 percent of our seats filled now; the issue is attendance, and you cannot legislate that people attend.**

**I dream of an Oversight Committee where we use Zoom technology for meetings, where we meet every month about the important issues in long-term care—especially from the perspective of the consumer, and where the Secretary of Aging further uses her platform to elevate how we can affect change and improve the quality of care for Maryland’s seniors.**

**This bill, however, is a conversation about the committee’s structure. That’s not the problem. The conversation we should be having is how we can better utilize the many people who consistently attend this committee and make things better.**

**In closing, I want to thank Senator Eckardt and Senator Beidle for their work on this committee. But I urge an unfavorable report on this legislation.**