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Testimony in Favor of SB 0047/ HB 806
February 4, 2021

Mme. Chairperson and Members of the Finance Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak in favor of SB 0047, ‘Health Facilities – Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Programs – Essential Caregivers’; and to ask for your positive support of this bill and, in particular, the definition of “Essential Caregiver” as written on page 2, line 22. To me, and to the families of thousands of residents of these facilities in Maryland, we are most appreciative of the phrase ...“as designated by a patient or resident ...” within that definition.

I would like to share some personal and anecdotal information with you, in the hopes it helps in your understanding of the “problem” and in recommending passage of this bill.

My wife, Helen, and I built, and have been living in, our Rockville home since 1968. We raised our three children and educated them in the Montgomery County Public Schools. Helen retired as a High School Math Teacher and I as a School Administrator. Our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren are all Marylanders.

Helen, my wife, of 58 years, has been suffering from dementia (FTD) for almost 7 years. Her cognitive decline forced me to place her in an Assisted Living Facility last March 2, 2020, after being her sole caregiver at home. On March 14, 2020, the facility went into “lock down”. I have not been able to be with her, touch her, hold her hand, or even be in her room since. While we had weekly “garden visits” in warmer weather, the pandemic is still requiring us to be apart. We “celebrated” our 58th wedding anniversary and her 78th birthday through her window, wearing masks and a face shield. A member of the staff was permitted to be with her and help her open her gifts and read her cards, but I was left outside, looking through a closed window. As a result, she no longer knows who I am and has physically and mentally declined PRIMARILY FROM LACK OF CONTACT WITH ME. I am an essential caregiver as much as any staff member in the facility, yet I am precluded from entry.

Worse yet, the current interpretation of “essential” by local authorities and the facility has precluded routine visits by the clergy, podiatrist, beautician. OT/PT, dentist, etc. As a result, she developed infected ingrown toenails, requiring medical intervention. She has lost the ability to walk and is now wheelchair bound. She has “lost” her removable teeth and I am not allowed in her room to look for them. Dentists are not allowed entry unless it is a “medical emergency”, so she cannot get a replacement appliance. If I “take her out” for such treatments, she will be isolated in her room for 14 days, EVEN IF TESTED NEGATIVE FOR COVID upon her return.

Dementia patients require routine and reinforcement. They need love and proximity to their loved ones. For her entire life, she has been proud of her appearance. She never went out of the house without lipstick, nails done, hair colored and combed etc. These simple things have been taken from her by the pandemic and by the tight implementation of **perceived** current regulations. Neither she nor I have any control in this matter. She is literally dying alone, isolated from me.

In my opinion, her Assisted Living Facility is one of the best in Maryland. All staff are certified in their respective positions. The place is well kept, food well prepared, and appropriate activities are being provided but ...

As a member of the Family Council, and as a frustrated spouse, we need and welcome your help. We need to be able to have the same access to our loved ones that the staff have. The residents need us, they need to feel our love. I have tried to communicate these concerns to our county officials with NO SUCCESS. The facilities on site management team are doing all they can but are equally frustrated by their corporate office and by local officials. We need clear legislation, at the State level, to put reasonable regulations in place. We need you to help us to be recognized as “Essential Caregivers” for our loved ones. We need you to bring some logic and empathy to this situation. We need you to recommend passage of this bill.

Thank you,

Dr. Stephen M. Raucher