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February 14, 2021  
Maryland Legislature,  
Annapolis, MD

RE: Support for House Bill 983

Dear Maryland Legislature,

But first some background on who I am, I'm a MD resident since 1993, middle child of 9 children raised in Michigan and my caring about nursing & patient care homes, begins with my very first job at a nursing home in MI where I would talk with patients like Jimmy Hoffa's mom and continued in NC where I worked in a hospital lab for 3 years until my father's unnatural hit & run driver death in 1978. The abruptness of my father's death in Detroit haunts all of the O'Brien's to this day. Here was a man who had survived WWII and the battles of Midway & Iwo Jima to die needlessly as the 516 murder in the murder capital at the time just didn't make sense. After my father's death, I dropped out of school and didn't finish for 18 years, but my mom went back to school and got a degree in Gerontology, to make some sense of her husband's death. Needless to say the subject of dignity of death was often a conversation among her nine children and a bond that drew us all closer.

Later in life I spent a lot of time touring asst. living facilities in Pikesville, MD to find a place for my mother-in-law where she resided for about 5 years until passing. Prior to choosing a facility my husband and I worked hard to keep her at home with help from various organizations including MD school of the Blind due to her loss of sight in her last years. She passed away from a stroke in my presence after I urged her to go because I would take of her son & grandson. One of my most touching memories of this time is my young son climbing into her bed and singing the songs she had taught him as he wanted to comfort her in her last days because of her DNR.

Later I helped care for my brother at his home in MI with help from Hospice transition from this world. He peacefully passed surrounded by all his siblings singing to him and telling him stories of our childhood. This is what my father deserved. Joe's passing was considered the "O'Brien Gold Standard" of how to depart this world by

our family at that time. We all wanted this for ourselves and our mom because she was most likely next. We joked about not wanting to be the last survivor of the 9 siblings due to the loneliness it would entail. All this caregiving brings me here today channeling my mother and my life experiences.

Please support this legislature House Bill 983 on behalf of my mom, Jean O'Brien, her family and myself, so other nursing home patients do not have to suffer from depression and isolation or die alone during a pandemic. We should all have our families around us during our passing to hand hold and talk about our shared memories. Our society uses isolation as punishment such as solitary confinement. Why would we want to punish nursing home patients when they already feel isolated by having to leave their lifelong homes and loved ones? All patients need advocates and visitors in these homes otherwise bad things can and do happen.

We have suffered with the Covid 19 pandemic for over a year now and have learned a lot about protecting ourselves from this disease such as masking, social distancing, etc. Mom, an early victim in a Covid nursing home, deaf, 101, lots of emotional baggage about abandonment issues earlier in life and isolated from view suffered tremendously from the Covid nursing home clampdown. She lost 15 pounds in two months and didn't look like herself when we were finally able to view her through a window. She didn't understand what happened to her large family and friends who had visited her constantly and was confused and happy when all her kids finally danced outside her window. I can hear her now, "What in the world?" after we told her what we had to go through to be with her.

The nursing home was not forthcoming in information due to the staff shortages because they were scared, getting sick, and dying too. During a pandemic nursing homes are short staffed and do not have the personnel to evaluate the patients which is why your bill allowing a third party to evaluate them is important. Most nursing home staff are grateful for the families coming in and doing the little things for the patients that they are unable to do, like putting hand lotion on hands or feet, helping to feed them, etc. Even now stories are coming out about the nursing homes death tolls and how great and underreported they are, so this bill will be a major step towards improving the lives of nursing home patients and their families. Many of you have already heard my mom's story as it was widely publicized in the Spring of 2020 in the Washington Post, ABC World News Tonight, Detroit News, etc. We realize there are many Jeans out there & stories about sickness, isolation and death in these homes in these times.

Put yourself in my mom's shoes. She made it through a two pandemics, depression, a fiance's death during the WWII, and later a spouse's murder, and raised 9 children by relying on her family and faith. When she needed them most we couldn't be there as much as we tried. She left this world ultimately feeling loved in the last 2 weeks but anxious and alone prior to this. My mom made it through more difficult times than this pandemic, but it is what ultimately did her in. We all enter and leave this world in the same way. This bill will allow patients to have peace in their final moments. Ultimately, what is more important than that?

Please enact this so you and I won't have to die alone. In the meantime, I will continue to visit my 85 year old cousin in Arlington, VA who gets to be taken out of her assisted living home once a week by her daughter utilizing precautions, even before she was vaccinated. This shared experience helps both parties in a major way to have normalcy and closure in these last days.

Sincerely,

Ellen O'Brien

I wrote some of the stuff below and took it out because I thought I needed to be under a time limits so I realize this story will seem disjointed but it was over a long period of time. Please bear with me as there were a lot of bad things to happen.

All this life trauma had led to my mom being put on some anxiety meds in the final years of her life. I saw my mom at the end of Dec.2019 and we laughed and carried on in a joyous manner. Most siblings had returned to MI to see my brother's son get married. On this day her Dr. assigned to the Nursing home cut this anxiety medicine dosage in half even though my mom was in the Hospice program for the past 3 years which requires palliative care be applied. The Dr. had not reported it to Hospice or my sister. My mom started acting out and many of the staff & family members noticed a change in her dark mood behavior but didn't know why until the middle of February when my sister Denise, her guardian, had the conference with Nursing home and Hospice. The change in meds was discovered. The meds were reinstated but her depression and extreme weight loss had already started.

I visited her at the end of February due to my sister's alarming news and left Michigan on March 9 planning on returning the following week due to some personal Dr appts of my own. During this time I was the literal food & liquid pusher. It was so obvious to me the weight loss which turned out to be 15 pounds in 2 months since I had seen her. Even this weighing of my mom which normally happened every month was beginning to be problematic. Staff shortages were beginning due to Covid but we weren't told this because there was not adequate testing & news. At this time I brought up taking my mom out of her nursing home sensing Covid restrictions were to be enacted. But because the Covid lockdown of nursing homes began on March 13 there wasn't much I could do so I didn't return for over another month. My mom's room was on the inside of a courtyard without a way into it. My siblings & I were heartsick thinking about my mom's isolation & decline. We have had folks visiting her everyday at this facility for years but now they couldn't. One thing about a large family she had many visitors year around. My mom isolation becomes greater because she is deaf unless one uses a pocket talker to ask her questions and engage her. The thought of her wasting away even more than what I had already seen was heartbreaking while we are starting to see the death tolls of nursing homes in NYC & New Jersey in the media impacting the elderly. So scary.

We camped outside her window at the nursing home from mid April to her death near the end of June enduring rain, snow & sleet. But isn't that what families do? Show up in times like this? In May, Four Chaplains Nursing Home informs us that they will put my mom back in the general population without testing whether or not she still has Covid. We were appalled. What about the staff and other patients? We had been sending in meals for all the shifts because we felt it was the least we could do for these loving caregivers. It was the corporate offices that we were getting the lies from not these aides & nurses.

Below is a letter my niece, Annie Rose O'Brien, almost PhD graduate at UNC wrote to the Governor of MI at the time. In April 2020 in response to some of the lies we were told by the parent company of my mom's nursing home. It captures a lot of the emotion at that time.

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Governor Whitmer,

I am writing my grandmother's obituary. She was born in September of 1918, during the 1918 flu pandemic. She grew up in Pittsburgh, one of four daughters. She married a union man and lived in Livonia for much of her life, where she raised 9 smart, headstrong, and sassy kids -- no easy feat. The union kept her and her husband busy until the tragic, unsolved death of her husband. But she kept going. She kept her family together. She kept herself together. She found comfort in her faith, in the Catholic Church. She put herself through college in her 60s, studying gerontology. She taught herself piano. She gardened, she played with her grandkids and -- later -- her great-grandkids. She moved to the South, where she played tennis and traded her Buick for a purple VW bug. Her house was struck by lightning one March, burning many of her keepsakes -- photos, quilts, tokens and trinkets of her life. She kept going, rebuilding on the foundation. She lived to be 80. She loved classic films, gin and liverpool rummy, and defeating any challenger at Scrabble. Then 90. She moved back to Michigan, to be closer to more of her children, to have more support as age caught up. She outlived her sisters, one of her children. She turned 100. Then 101.

I am writing my grandmother's obituary, not because she has passed, but because NexCare Health Systems has decided that an opportunity for corporate profit is more important than her life. In an effort to increase their earnings, they have volunteered to bring COVID-19 patients into the care facility where my grandmother lives. Four Chaplains, in Westland, is forcing its staff and residents into a terrible and dangerous situation, where they will share space and breath with people suffering from COVID-19 and the residents they work to support. While I fully believe we should be doing all we can to help people suffering during this pandemic, I do not think it should be at the expense of some of the most vulnerable and long-lived among us. We should also not force people into a situation where they may spread the virus, to their loved ones and the people they so kindly and generously take care of.

NexCare informed us of this decision Easter morning, though we have learned from others that not everyone was informed. They told us that they HAD to do this, that it was required of them by the mandate of Governor Whitmer. We have not been able to see or speak with my grandmother for weeks, as the facility has been on lockdown to mitigate the spread of the virus. We have seen what the virus can do at nursing homes around the country -- in Livonia, Seattle, NYC. There is not even a window we can see her through, to show her that we are still here, that we love her, that we have not abandoned her. But to tell us that we cannot see our mother, our grandmother, our great-grandmother because of this virus, and then to move people

who are actively infected with this virus into her facility, strikes me as stunningly ludicrous and heartless. They have told us she is listless, despondent. We fear she won't make it through this -- that the isolation and proximity to illness will be too much. NexCare says that there is nothing they can do, they have sentenced my grandmother to this fate. If she dies, will we be allowed in? Will she die alone at Four Chaplains after a life of hard work and true grit, with none of her loved ones by her side? No one knows, and NexCare doesn't seem to want to tell us. So I'm writing my grandmother's obituary. My strong, tough, lovely, silly, snarky, 101-year-old grandmother's obituary. Because NexCare, the governor, and the American healthcare system seem to think that she has to die.

Below are some of the media links to other stories about Jean O'Brien and what we went through. Most of these stories appear as a children's loving tribute to their mom on Mothers' day but our purpose was to raise hell against NexCare and make folks aware of what bad decisions were being made regarding institutionalized Covid patients.

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/siblings-move-airbnb-close-101-year-mom-fighting/story?id=70589550>

[https://www.fox2detroit.com/news/duggan-believes-about-10-of-nursing-home-residents-in-detroit-will-die-of-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR1ofVtO\\_YcYm\\_ydTnigcOeeDBgpygry2VITRc-0F-A3xLJSb3\\_jDE\\_RDIA](https://www.fox2detroit.com/news/duggan-believes-about-10-of-nursing-home-residents-in-detroit-will-die-of-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR1ofVtO_YcYm_ydTnigcOeeDBgpygry2VITRc-0F-A3xLJSb3_jDE_RDIA)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/05/07/these-7-siblings-are-camped-outside-their-mothers-window-she-fights-covid-19/?fbc>

[https://www.fox2detroit.com/news/patients-staff-at-nursing-homes-hit-hard-by-covid-19-pandemic-here-are-their-stories?fbclid=IwAR0tQrZ9WIHfa5IB\\_YVr90F9sC7KcldCLHrzy5GPsfcdU6c0GXn9YCe76Pg](https://www.fox2detroit.com/news/patients-staff-at-nursing-homes-hit-hard-by-covid-19-pandemic-here-are-their-stories?fbclid=IwAR0tQrZ9WIHfa5IB_YVr90F9sC7KcldCLHrzy5GPsfcdU6c0GXn9YCe76Pg)

