

Testimony in Support of SB 0751 from Darlene Galeski

12407 Catoctin View Drive, Mt Airy, MD 21771, fdgaleski@comcast.net, cell 910-546-1401

February 28, 2025

To: Finance Committee Chair Pamela Beidle

Chairman Beidle, thank you for this opportunity to speak at this hearing in support for this bill, and for your years of support for Maryland's senior citizens.

As a member of the Eldercare Advocacy Group of Central Maryland I am speaking today in memory of my mother-in-law, Hennie Madsen, who was a resident in an assisted living facility in Frederick, Md for seven years. At the time of her death in 2022 the cost for her care at this facility totaled \$460,000. You may be wondering what the cost of her care has to do with this bill. I will explain in my closing.

A family council was established soon after she arrived. The council was very purposeful for many years. Family members established positive relationships with administration and other staff members. We all worked together as a team to make sure issues regarding care were addressed. Council meetings were a great opportunity to learn more about the daily operations of the facility that affected Hennie's care, such as pharmacy, dietary, housekeeping. Communication between the members of the family council and the facility director was crucial. (please see attachment of meeting minutes, concerns letter to the director and the response back from the director). Often the response from the director was more than thirty days.

The intent of the council remained foremost as we were able to accomplish many positive changes, such as more dietary options, a locked closet for storing depends and nametags for staff. Because we were able to deal with these concerns in the confines of the family council, we did not have to go to the Ombudsman who was needed to deal with bigger complaints and concerns such as abuse and injury investigations. The Ombudsman was always available to us if we needed to consult with her. We invited our local Hospice Chaplin to attend our meetings. His calm demeanor and ability to remain neutral when giving his opinion helped us to stay focus and not turn the meeting into a grip session. It was also a great opportunity to learn more about Hospice so we would be prepared when Hennie needed their services.

Some have asked why we need legislation when Family Councils are in the Assisted Living Comar regulations. Please see attached. The regulations in front of you are the new revised regulations that have been three years in the making and still have not been approved yet.

The Comar regulations are very vague and do not address many issues that prevent family councils from being established and being successful in an assisted living facility.

SB 0751 identifies the importance of the fourteen-day response time from administration to let the council know they are mindful of the concerns. It also asked that the facilities make family council information, including member number, minutes and communication to and from administration, available to all potential and current residences and their families. Family Council information needs to be public information.

Establishing a Family Council in an Assisted Living facility is of no cost directly to the facility. The positive outcomes related to care should save the facility money as it may prevent legal litigation.

As I close, I will explain how the cost of Hennie's care is related to this bill. The family council in her facility disbanded due to lack of support from the administration. Covid came and it was never reestablished after that. As her physical and mental health declined during her last three years there so did her care. Simple things such as making sure she had oral hygiene and storage of her false teeth, cleaning her glasses so she could read, making sure her snacks were not stolen and proper toileting hygiene especially when she would have an accident because she couldn't use the bathroom downstairs and had to go to her room on the third floor. These are the things that could have been taken care of in a family council but there was none. Every time my husband and I would tell administration about these situations additional points would be added to her level of care score. More points mean a higher level of care on paper, which means an increase in the monthly cost sometimes up to \$1500 or more. During the last year Hennie ran out of money and my husband and I paid for her care, dipping into money we set aside for our care when needed.

Senior citizens of Maryland and their families deserve to have a voice regarding their care in Assisted Living Facilities. I believe that having Family Councils not only saves money for the facility and for the families but opens constructive communication making their final years a much more positive experience.

These are the reasons why I support Senate Bill 0741 and hope you will too.

Thank you.