

TO: Chair Beidle and members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Corine Donley

HEARING DATE: March 10, 2026

BILL: SB 549 – Mental Health – Treatment Plans for Individuals in Facilities – Participation of Family Members or Other Individuals (The H.E.R. Continuity of Care Act)

POSITION: SUPPORT (FAV)

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Finance Committee,

I am writing to you today as a grandmother who has experienced the heartbreak of my family navigating a terrifying mental health crisis alone. I am urging a favorable report for SB 549, the H.E.R. Continuity of Care Act to ensure there is healing, equity, and representation in a mental health crisis.

As a family, we did not wait for a tragedy to act. We were proactive. We ensured that the proper legal documents were fully executed and in place—the very documents this bill seeks to protect. We believed these papers were the voice for when my loved one could not find their own. We believed they guaranteed our right to support them, to advocate for their safety, and to ensure they received the continuity of care needed.

Instead, we were met with a wall of silence.

Despite presenting our legal authority, our family was blocked. During this crisis, the system failed my loved one in two distinct, devastating ways that SB 549 would have prevented:

Failure of Informed Advocacy: The healthcare team did not adequately explain my loved one's rights or ensure that they truly understood their options for family involvement. In the fog of a psychiatric emergency, a patient cannot be expected to navigate complex legalities alone. Advocacy is only "informed" if the facility is held to a standard of clear, verbal communication.

The Dismissal of Preparedness: By blocking a family that had already established legal standing, the facility rendered our years of preparation useless. The system chose to isolate a vulnerable individual rather than recognize the legal directives intended to protect them.

SB 549 is essential because it mandates the "Plain Language" requirement. It ensures that facilities are held accountable for actually informing individuals that they have the right to have their family present. It ensures that when a family takes the responsible step of putting legal directives in place, those documents are honored, not ignored.

Watching my loved one suffer while their Advocate has the very papers that should have been allowed to help them was a soul-crushing experience. No family should have to stand by helplessly because a facility failed to honor the law or properly inform a patient in crisis.

I respectfully ask for a favorable report on SB 549 to ensure that families are respected as partners in care when the stabilization is at stake.

Sincerely,

Corine Donley