



Dear LEGISLATOR:

I am writing/calling in support of the Essential Caregivers Act of 2021 (H.R. 3733), which would create a mandatory access program for residents of nursing homes and other communal care settings – such as intermediate care facilities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities – during public health emergencies.

For nearly a year between March 2020 and March 2021, residents of these communities were under strict lockdowns designed to protect them from COVID-19. At the beginning of the pandemic, the ban was framed as a difficult but necessary strategy for maintaining the safety of the most vulnerable members of our society against a poorly understood and deadly threat.

But as COVID-19 dragged on through the summer and fall, it became clear that isolating people from their support networks was having a deleterious effect on their physical and mental health. In addition, countless families expressed frustration and anger at not being able to even verify that their loved ones were safe and healthy amid prolonged breakdowns in communication.

Even as safe and effective vaccines facilitate the easing of these lockdowns, ongoing outbreaks and confusion over the complex patchwork of rules continue to isolate residents of these facilities.

The Essential Caregivers Act would provide a safe, easy-to-follow blueprint for families and providers to use when navigating access during the current pandemic and any future public health emergency.

Each resident of a nursing home or other communal setting would be able to name up to two designated caregivers who would be allowed to visit for up to 12 hours per day. To ensure the safety of other residents and facility staff, these designated caregivers would be required to follow the same infection-control procedures as employees, including the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), receipt of the vaccine and/or a negative COVID-19 test, and submitting to any other health screening requirements prior to entry.

The Essential Caregivers Act represents a major step forward for the rights of elders and people with disabilities in America. Never again would families have to know the pain of not being able to say goodbye to a mother or father, or have to live with prolonged uncertainty about whether their sons and daughters are receiving the proper care and supports. Never again would elders and people with disabilities need to spend months without any direct physical contact with the people they love.

COVID-19 taught us a painful lesson about the importance of family caregivers and social connectedness for people of all ages and abilities. I urge you to pass the Essential Caregivers Act of 2021 to ensure that the illness, death, and loneliness endured since March 2020 did not happen in vain.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME