

In my humble opinion, 2020 was the worst year that our great country has endured in almost 100 years. COVID-19 took the world by surprise, and came with a litany of issues that required quick responses from local, state, and federal government officials and agencies. It majorly tested laws, policies, and procedures, many of which are outdated and poorly thought out. Many of these need some amending and tweaking, and others need a major overhaul. Throughout this past year, it has become evident that there are glaring imbalances in the amount of power that many agencies, departments, and individuals in our state possess. Many of these are unelected positions, meaning that they were not chosen by the voters in ND, but simply appointed by the governor. Unilateral decisions were made that had disastrous effects on so many of our citizens. Without a doubt, the most egregious of all of these was committed against the residents of our long term care facilities, and their families.

I can describe my testimony in two words: ONE YEAR.

It has been ONE YEAR since I have been able to be with my 83 year-old father, who has dementia that is worsening by the day. He has been a resident at the Bethel Lutheran Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, in Williston, ND, since August, 2017. It was one of the most difficult decisions our family has ever made, but knowing that we could see him, as often as we desired, made us feel more secure that it was for the best. We loved going to see him. We loved signing him out and going for drives in the country, or taking him home for part of a day so he could sit in his old easy chair and watch his grandchildren play. We all were certainly making the best of a difficult situation.

Almost one year ago, these rights were stolen from us. We could no longer see my dad, period. All for a virus with a 99.98% overall survival rate. Yes, the LTC population obviously is at higher risk than most people, but still enjoys a 95% survival rate. The phrase "Draconian lockdown" only begins to describe the measures that have been taken—and that still exist to this day. I could understand a few weeks...maybe a month. This has dragged on and on, and decisions have continually and erroneously been based on fear, stubbornness, politics, and poor information. They certainly have not been based on good science or even common sense or decency. They took no account of what this complete segregation and isolation from family has had on my dad, or any of the other residents in LTC facilities across the state. The fact that this is still persisting is almost criminal, in my opinion. This can never, EVER happen again.

This virus, though terrible in its own right, did not merit the "all-or-nothing" response that has been instituted.

What frustrates me the most, and tears at my heart, is the fact that the last time I got to be near my dad, he knew who I was. Over the past few "prison visits" through the glass, with masks on, on the telephone, I'm afraid he no longer knows that I am his son. I can never get that back. It was bad enough that we had to be separated by a glass wall, but apparently, the virus could be transmitted through the glass, or possibly through the telephone, which is why we both had to wear a mask? That is absolutely ridiculous, heartless, and cruel, and I fully blame the ND Department of Human Services for this. As I stated above, this can NEVER, EVER happen again, which is why I implore you to pass SB 2145. Thank you very much, and God bless.