

Thank you Chairwoman Lee and members of the Human Service Committee for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 2145 – the Essential Caregiver Bill.

My name is Amber Vibeto, from Minot District 3, and I'm here today on behalf of the North Dakota Conservative Political Action Committee representing conservative men and women across the state in nearly all 47 voting districts.

As we have endured the spread of COVID-19 and the government's response to it for the last year with no end in sight, and because we are arguably no longer in a state of emergency, it is clear that it is time to revisit all of the restrictions that have been put in place, including those that have been placed on the North Dakota residents of long-term care facilities and assisted living rental apartments.

Restricted visitation was well-intended to keep residents and staff safe in both long-term care facilities and assisted living rental apartments. However, one of the unintended consequences of this ongoing executive order is the considerable emotional trauma that many of our elderly North Dakota citizens, as well as their family members, have gone through, and continue to go through as we speak. On June 5, 2020 the state outlined a phased approach to resume visitation in long-term care facilities, but to date there are some facilities that have continued to stay closed to visitation even with zero COVID-19 cases. This extended restriction in visitation is due to the executive order (2020.22.1) allowing for healthcare staff to implement more restrictions than what CMS already has in place.

The ND Conservative Political Action Committee would like to go on record as supporters of the Essential Caregiver Bill. We believe that residents should never again be completely cut off from their family members and friends with no end, and therefore, no hope in sight. Having an outside caregiver such as a family member or friend is imperative in providing the holistic and ethical care our elderly citizens deserve. Yes, we should be protecting our vulnerable population from COVID-19, but their mental and emotional health must be taken into considerable consideration. It is a cruel thing to force innocent, law-abiding citizens to isolate for months on end, but particularly when they are living out their last days. What makes the restrictions on our elderly so much worse is that many of these residents fought for your freedom and for mine. The very least we can do is honor their sacrifice by extending back that very freedom and allow them to choose who will be with them to comfort them in their last days. Please vote in favor of Senate Bill 2145 and advocate for the removal of executive order 2020.22.1. Thank you for your time and for allowing me to testify on behalf of this important issue.

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