

Connecticut General Assembly
SENATE DEMOCRATS

Legislative Office Building, Room 3300
Hartford, Connecticut 06106-1591

April 22, 2020

Dear Governor Ned Lamont:

Thank you for your tireless work on behalf of the people of Connecticut during this time of unprecedented challenge and crisis. We are gratified that your initiatives to deal with the COVID pandemic have always included those of our fellow citizens for whom the crisis poses the greatest challenges, including the poor and the powerless. The undersigned Senate Democrats and House Democrat write to ask that you consider an important form of support for one group of our fellow citizens for whom COVID poses an especially grave threat, is people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), including autism and behavioral disorders.

On their behalf, and on behalf of their fearful families, we are writing to urgently request that the State of Connecticut issue a uniform policy that would permit their loved ones or caregivers to accompany them in the event of their hospitalization during the current COVID-19 crisis. This compassionate policy has already been implemented in New York.

The hospitalization of many people with IDD- even in less trying times- can create problems that quickly spiral out of control, leading to the sedation and restraint of that person with I/DD. This is difficult for everyone involved as it imposes huge burdens on hospital staff that, in the current crisis, are already stretched to the breaking point. Permitting someone to accompany the person with I/DD will make treatment far easier and more efficient, while at the same time being more compassionate for the person needing treatment.

We understand that on March 27, 2020, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) sent a letter to hospitals that would create this sort of compassionate exception for some persons with I/DD, *and we applaud that effort*. However, it did not go far enough, because it only addressed a small percentage of people with I/DD, namely those residing in group homes (CLAs) or other residential facilities supported by DDS.

All the challenges, behaviors, and types of disability that exist in DDS-funded facilities, also exist in Connecticut family homes and other community settings. We believe that any policy, no matter how well-intended, that results in such illogically disparate treatment of the larger I/DD population demands modification.

Moreover, DDS lacks the authority to direct any hospital to change its policies. Accordingly, we respectfully request that you direct the Department of Public Health to implement one consistent patient support policy for all people with I/DD who might require hospitalization during this crisis.

On April 11, 2020, the State of New York, with which Connecticut has closely and productively allied itself throughout this crisis, issued an Updated DOH Guidance on Hospital Visitation Policies, (<https://www.gnyha.org/news/updated-doh-guidance-on-hospital-visitation-policies/>). The policy requires hospitals to permit a patient-support person at the patient bedside for several populations, including those for whom “a support person has been determined to be essential to the care of the patient (medically necessary) *including patients with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities...*” (Emphasis supplied.) The guidance also includes recommendations for PPE, and screening of visitors.

The NY guidance is clear, straightforward and does not treat people with I/DD differently based on where or with whom they reside. While Connecticut has aligned its response with New York in so many regards, it has thus far failed to do so when it comes to this vulnerable group of Connecticut citizens.

We fully appreciate the strain that you, and all people on the frontline of this crisis, are under. However, it is our understanding that this is something that has been discussed by DPH, CHA and DDS over the course of the past two weeks without resolution or action.

We are reaching out to you because the surge in COVID-19 is projected to occur over the next several weeks and we can so easily foresee the needless suffering that will occur if people with I/DD- most of whom have never faced a challenge like hospitalization on their own- are left to fend for themselves during the middle of an unprecedented health crisis.

There is so much suffering in Connecticut, and throughout our country, that is beyond our power to avoid or mitigate. The terror of a person with I/DD hospitalized alone, and the almost unimaginable angst of their loved ones, is something that we can avoid.

We stand ready to assist you in any way you request to help fashion a policy that both lessens the trauma for people with I/DD and lessens the imposition on hospital staff during the current crisis.

Sincerely,



Senate President Pro Tempore Martin M. Looney
11th Senate District



Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff
25th Senate District



Senator Derek Slap
5th Senate District



Senator Julie Kushner
24th Senate District



Senator John Fonfara
1st Senate District



Senator Mary Abrams
13th Senate District



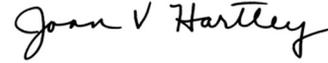
Senator Saud Anwar
3rd Senate District



Senator Matt Lesser
9th Senate District



Senator Steve Cassano
4th Senate District



Senator Joan Hartley
15th Senate District



Senator Alex Kasser
36th Senate District



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26th Senate District



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10th Senate District



Senator Carlo Leone
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Senator Cathy Osten
19th Senate District



Senator Doug McCrory
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