

February 7, 2024

SB 352

Proponent

In Person testimony

Testimony of Julie Ribelin

Chairman Sen. Richard Hilderbrand and Members of the Committee,

My name is Julie Ribelin, and I am here because some of my Dad's last words to me in October of 2021 were, "This is evil, take it to the top!" I am here to tell you what the "It" was he was speaking of, and finally doing what he asked me to do.

My Dad became ill on Wednesday, September 22, 2021. He spent the next 4 days at home with my Mom, trying to recuperate enough to meet his newest great grandson that had been born on the 19th. He did not get better and the next Sunday, September 26, 2021 asked my Mom to take him to the hospital. This was a very difficult decision as he and my mom had both volunteered for many years at both hospitals, right up to the time he became sick. He was concerned about the extreme policies and how they could possibly affect them, but he needed medical attention and sought it. He believed their experience and contacts at the hospital would keep the situation from getting bad. As I stated, my mom had been with him 24/7 since the day he started feeling ill, but when they got to the hospital, he was separated from her and my brother, given a Covid screening test, and then not allowed a goodbye hug, touch or even an in person "see you in a while". My mom was kept from going to him, and my brother was the only one to be able to get to him to quickly deliver a few personal items and touch his head before he was taken away. My Mom immediately started working her way through every channel available to her, believing that she would be allowed to join him and care for him. She believed she would be able to be an advocate for my Dad while he was weak and ill, and unable to speak up for himself. My parents did not believe that their efforts would be stymied at every turn by people who KNEW that human touch is healing and that EVERYONE who is in the hospital for ANY length of time needs an advocate to speak and act on their behalf. Actually none of my family could believe what happened, and are still saddened and shocked by these evil and senseless policies that were enforced by people "just doing their jobs", contrary to actual science and common sense.

For the next 3 weeks while my mom worked tirelessly to gain access to my dad, we used electronic means to share life with him and keep him as encouraged as possible. For the next 19 days, although the his medicines were delivered in a mostly timely fashion, he, in his weakened state was expected to select his meals daily from a piece of paper he could not read. (he was unable to put his glasses on due to the bi-pap machine) When he did attempt to put his glasses on to read under the bi-pap, he cut his nose badly enough that he was not able to attempt that again. He was somehow expected to have the energy to feed and hydrate himself as the Doctors and nurses spoke to him from his doorway because putting the PAPR suits on or the PPM was difficult and they were frightened of becoming sick. However, my mom wasn't. For those 3 weeks, she asked repeatedly if she could put on the PPE, and was willing to do so, to care for her best friend and husband of almost 57 years. She could have read the menu to him, and coaxed him into eating, she could have washed his face, shaved him, combed his hair and kept his water fresh. She was denied. Several of his granddaughters made daily trips to the hospital to take him hot coffee in hopes of encouraging him to drink and eat. Each day they asked if they could take it up to him personally, that they would wear whatever was required, and they were also denied. His great grandkids figured out what window he was looking out of and stood in the field waving signs where he could see them, he flashed his room lights for them. All of this to say my dad had people who were willing to put themselves out for him, but none of them were allowed to help him when he needed it the most.

On the 19th day apart, the longest my parents had EVER been apart since high school, both of them had decided independently that today was the day that they were going to see each other. My mom went to the Patient Advocate and said she was not leaving until some kind of exception was made and she was allowed to go to her husband. Even then, the insanity continued. It was decided that an exception could be made for 1 day. There were conditions, my mom would don the protective gear and only be allowed to stay until she either needed to eat or drink something or to use the restroom, and then she would not be allowed back in. Who in their right mind tells a 75 year old

woman she cannot eat, drink or use the restroom on one of the most distressing days of her life?? And that the consequence of doing so would prematurely end her only visit with her husband??

These pictures are from that day. We all celebrated to see the selfie of my parents reunited, even if Dad looked exhausted and Mom was in a PAPR suit. The second picture is the difference my mom's presence and care made. Human touch, compassion and care are essential, from someone you love and care for, it is miraculously comforting.

This is the evil my dad spoke of, isolation, not being allowed an advocate and caregiver when you are at your weakest and most vulnerable. Total lack of consent and control over your own situation and no common sense in allowing strangers to be nearer you than your family is allowed to be. He was unable to comfort his wife, my mom during some of the most difficult days of her life, she was not allowed to comfort and care for her husband during the final and most difficult days of his life. Evil and totally unnecessary. Heartless and should never have happened and for sure should never be allowed to happen again.