



**WISCONSIN FAMILY ACTION**  
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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF ASSEMBLY BILL 215**  
**ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON AGING AND LONG-TERM CARE**  
**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2022**  
**JULAIN K. APPLING, PRESIDENT**

Thank you, Chairman Gundrum and committee members, for the opportunity to testify on Assembly Bill 215. Wisconsin Family Action supports this bill.

My testimony is extremely brief today. I am confident that throughout this hearing you will hear about studies that show the very real good that comes from patients and residents being allowed to have family or close friends with them during a serious illness or extended stay. I'm not adding to what I am sure will be more than adequate "scientific proof" of the need for this bill. There's no reason to belabor that information.

This is common sense bill, but it is much more than that at this point. It's the right thing to do and is at least a step in the right direction for assuring that desperately ill people are afforded the care and support of people who love them. We believe the bill strikes an appropriate risk-benefit balance and still allows the health-care facilities to enact and enforce their public health regulations and policies and also provides an exception should the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services issues more restrictive guidance.

Horror stories abound about families being separated from loved ones who have been in the hospital during COVID, or residents of nursing homes or long-term care facilities being isolated for months. As we know all too well, in some of these situations, people have died alone without the support of loving family members, including spouses. This is egregiously wrong. It's profoundly sad to think how many people this has happened to in our state.

Over the last several months we have received numerous calls from people whose husband or wife or mom or dad or adult child have been in the hospital grievously ill, and they cannot visit them because of the hospital's visitation restrictions during COVID. These folks are justifiably upset, even distraught. They've wanted to know what their legal options are. In essence, they've begged us, some in tears, for help—and we've been powerless to help them in one of the most stressful times of their lives. The same has happened for loved ones in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities.

In general, we believe private businesses should be able to set their own policies. Similarly, in general we believe the fewer regulations any level of government puts on private business, the better. But these visitation policies have been egregiously wrong. While I'm sure the decision-makers in these hospitals and facilities did not intend to dehumanize their patients, that's been one of the consequences of keeping them from loving family members and friends.

We realize hospitals and long-term care facilities are, like all the rest of us, trying to do what is best to deal with a virus that just doesn't seem to let us out of its clutches, but their visitation rules in too many instances have been more harmful than helpful to both patient and family members. It's unfortunate we need to have a state law that forces these health-care providers to allow at least one essential visitor and a member of the clergy access to a patient, but that's where we apparently are right now.

I suspect this bill has sat for nearly a year because everyone was hoping it would become unnecessary or at least not of great urgency because the virus would have released its vise-like grip. However, that didn't happen. So, at this point, we urge this committee to take quick executive action and get the bill to the full Assembly for a vote. Surely this is a bill the governor will see as necessary for the health and well-being of our citizens.

Thank you for your time today and for your careful consideration of our position on this bill.