

Chair Gelser-Blouin, Vice Chair Linthicum and Committee Members

RE: Support for Senate Bill 228—The Independent Family Council Bill.

Thank you for your continued support of your constituents who reside in Long Term Care Facilities and their family members.

In my work as a Deputy Ombudsman, I have served in many counties during my time with the agency. From rural coastal areas to more populated areas. One of the most rewarding things I have been able to be a part of is the creation and support of an Independent Family Council.

One of the benefits of an Independent Family Council is the bonds that form among the members. Family members become connected with others who are experiencing or have experienced what they are now going through. Family members may be grieving the loss of the person they used to know or feel guilt that they could not continue to provide care at home. People new to memory care can gather valuable information from existing council members. It is invaluable for people to know they are not alone; they can connect with others walking a similar path.

It is important that councils operate independently from, yet collaboratively with the facility. When a council operates independently, they are able to choose the agenda for their meetings. They decide what topics they would like information on. Many times in a meeting someone would have a question, for example how does Medicaid work? The group would find a subject matter expert and invite them to speak. In this way the group responds to the expressed needs of its members. There is not a predetermined idea of what it is that family members need to know. They direct their own learning and agenda. The Independence also creates a safe place for people to express concerns and learn how others have navigated similar issues. Even in the best facilities family members are sometimes hesitant to ask questions or express concerns. Being able to speak in a group that is not facility sponsored allows members to ask any question without worrying about how it will be received.

An Independent Family Council can be a great asset to a facility. I have observed in council meetings a sincere desire by the members to collaborate with the facility. They want the facility to be the best it can be and are often the biggest supporters of the facility. They recognize and appreciate those who are caring for their loved ones. However, no facility no matter how well run can provide the safe space, support and learning opportunities that a self-directed Independent Family Council can offer its members. It allows family members to be heard.

By supporting Independent Family Councils, you will not only be supporting the residents residing in memory care communities but their families, and friends. Allowing them to get the support and education they need to in turn provide the social, emotional and day to day support their loved ones need.

Please take this opportunity to support and protect the right of family members to form Independent Family Councils and support Senate Bill 228.

Thank you,

Debbie Boures

Deputy State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

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