

To: Chair Williams and Members of the House Committee on Human Services
From: Don Petersen of Portland, Oregon
Subject: Support for HB 2394
Date: February 8, 2021

Chair Williams and member of the Committee, my name is Don Petersen and I am from Portland, Oregon. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2394, legislation to prevent the social isolation of individuals in long-term care during public emergencies.

I am a caregiver for my wife Judi. We have been married for 56 years. Judi has Alzheimer's disease and has been living in one of Oregon's memory care communities for the past several years.

Judi has a very limited ability to converse and that greatly complicates using technology to connect. When two people are physically together they can derive pleasure from activities that allow them to be together with little talking. Doing that successfully via electronic means requires some new thinking.

Pre-COVID

In the summer of 2019 I often took Judi for walks in her transport chair. That summer I pushed Judi 130 miles. It was good for Judi and I certainly benefited from being with her and from the exercise of pushing her while walking. In the summer of 2020, we were unable to do any walking.

Most days I had lunch with Judi and helped her eat. After lunch we sat together in her room and watched old I Love Lucy and Andy Griffith shows.

These were pleasant ways to spend time together and there was little talking required.

Initial COVID Lockdown

At the start of the COVID lockdown I had no interest in chatting by video. Given that Judi really can't carry a conversation, how could that possibly work? Then I got talked into trying a video call. Judi, our daughter Gail, and I tried visiting but it was hard because there is was little that we could talk about. Then my daughter sang a song and Judi perked up and focused on the iPad screen. Next I sang an song and I immediately knew that we had stumbled onto something big. I started connecting with Judi on FaceTime three or four times a week. Over the next few months our visits evolved to an hour seven days per week.

Currently

Judi is doing much better than many of the other residents. I have been told that after we sing she is in a better mood and does better for hours. Sometimes she is "down" when we start, but she is always "up" by the end. We are doing so well on FaceTime that I have declined indoor visits that would require us to be dressed in full PPE and remain 6 feet apart with no touching.

At this time I think it is better for us to visit on FaceTime where we can see each other and feel close and connected.

If your loved one can't converse it's very difficult to use the technology effectively. Families need to have a resource perhaps a YouTube video that can show them how to get the most from the technology that is available. This should include some examples of its effective use.

Families need to have a plan for how they're going to use the time they have for their online connection. They could

- Sing either with or without accompaniment
 - YouTube is a wonderful resource. There are many YouTube videos with wonderful images to go along with the song and many also have the lyrics on the screen so it is easy to sing along with them.
- Play music
 - This is a great way to help a loved one maintain their connection to their faith. Every day I sing some Christian hymns to Judi.
 - I usually play the YouTube video on my computer screen and then I have the option to position my iPad or iPhone so that Judi can see the video instead of me.
- Show old photographs
 - I have displayed photos on my computer screen and then positioned my iPad or iPhone so that Judi can see the photos. Wedding photos, honeymoon photos, and photos of our kids growing up all work well.
- Read old letters
 - Judi saved 100 Love Letters from 1964, the year before we got married. I often read one of the letters and then we sing Sentimental Journey. We have been through the stack once and we are working our way through it a second time. I always start by showing Judi the envelope and ask her who was Miss Judith Kirby? And then remind her "That was you before we got married."
- Some other pleasant activity that doesn't require talking

Conclusion

During an emergency, electronic visual connection with loved ones can make a huge difference in a person's ability to survive the isolation and loneliness.

Families with a loved one who is unable to converse may not be able to make good use of the technology without someone providing some examples of its successful use.

I believe that HB 2394 will be an important part of ensuring that everyone in a Senior Living facility has the social interaction that they need to do well during an extended lockdown. I urge you to support the passage of HB 2394.

Thank you.