

Cherry Simms Testimony in Opposition to HB 2638

February 24th, 2021.

My name is Cherry Simms. I would like to share my mother, Ella Taylor's, story with you today. She was a resident at the Healthcare at Foster Creek nursing home when she died on April 2nd, 2020 of COVID-19, two days after her birthday. My mother raised my brother and me in Northeast Portland. Growing up, she ran a daycare at our house, so we always had a lot of kids around. She was loving, caring and generous to all who entered our home and our life. It was her passion to help raise these children. I also speak today for my son Michael Cage, who lives in Portland and grew up with my mom.

Many of the kids she cared for came from poor families. She would often take the kids to buy food, clothes and even give them groceries out of the kitchen. If a family had trouble paying for their daycare, she would never cut them off and always allow them to come back without paying. That was just how she was. When she got the point of needing someone to care for her, we trusted Foster Creek. But in her time of need, Foster Creek left my mother behind.

I moved to California in 2006, where I currently work as a Product Operations Analyst for Kaiser Permanente. I would like to think I have some experience with the way our healthcare systems operate. When I left, my mom moved into her own apartment off MLK Blvd in Portland. At that point, she was beginning to show signs of dementia. On a few occasions, my son, Michael, went to her home and found things around the house were arranged in very perplexing ways and my mom struggled to understand what she was doing. In 2013, she was evaluated and sent to be cared for at Foster Creek.

Mike was her first grandchild. They were always close and she helped raise him, allowing me to stay focused on work and providing for our family. He saw her transition from being her normal, loving self to someone who became unaware of her actions as she slipped away. He would visit her frequently at Foster Creek and was shocked about the lack of security and staff that were not around. Often, he was able to walk right in, there was no one at the front desk and patient room doors were open, allowing people to freely roam between. My mom lived in a wing with patients dealing with mental health issues and on multiple occasions, a male patient would wander inside of her room when they were supposed to be kept separate. I would drive up every 2-3 months from California to visit her and check on her. In her state, communicating with her over the phone wasn't an option.

In early March, we got our first communication from Foster Creek about COVID-19. The letter said staff were being trained on safety standards to contain outbreaks and were deep cleaning the facilities. They promised us they were actively monitoring the situation. I was worried and I would call frequently to check in. We didn't receive much of an update for about three weeks. At that point, they said she was doing well and didn't show any signs of COVID-19. There was news of another case in the facility, but we were told the patient was being isolated.

The very next day, they informed me she had a fever and a few more symptoms associated with COVID-19. At that point, they said they were keeping her comfortable and giving her Tylenol. I asked them to test her but was told that they could not perform testing because they claimed they could not get any testers into the facility. Two days later her oxygen levels were low, and her fever was up to 101 degrees. At that point, they officially suspected she had COVID, but claimed they were still unable to

confirm. I don't really know what they were doing because they had stopped running their care decisions through us. We felt helpless.

She turned 77 on March 31st, while battling for her life with coronavirus. She died two days later. I feel Foster Creek gave up on her, now that we know what was really going on at that place. She was someone who always put everything on the line to care for others. Even when she had to sacrifice what little she had to do so. We put our faith in Foster Creek to care for and protect our mother just like she cared for and protected her daycare kids and their families. We didn't get the truth from Foster Creek and they covered up the critical decisions about her care. We need your help to figure out what happened to our mother and grandmother. We need you to protect our rights to hold these kinds of facilities accountable when they break their own rules and hide the truth about what they failed to do.