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THE SENATE OF TEXAS



LOIS W. KOLKHORST

STATE SENATOR
DISTRICT 18

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 17, 2021

Senator Kolkhorst's Essential Caregiver Legislation Gains Senate Approval

AUSTIN - After an hour of emotional debate, the Texas Senate unanimously approved Senator Lois W. Kolkhorst's SB 25, aimed at strengthening visitation rights for loved ones in long-term care facilities. During COVID-19, many Texas residents in nursing homes and similar settings were not allowed to maintain contact and personal visits with friends and family for months during public health emergency.

"Visiting a loved one in a nursing home should be a right, not a privilege. Friends and family provide emotional support and protect residents from unseen neglect," said Kolkhorst. "If another health emergency occurs, our state's caregivers will always have a way to safely go inside a facility for scheduled visits and ensure that their loved one's physical, social, and emotional needs are being met."

During last year's pandemic response, state agency rules were imposed that restricted access to long-term care facilities, such as nursing homes and state supported living centers, and issued even if there were no cases of the illness present. Consequently, many families across the state have been denied any personal visits with parents, children, spouses, and others residing in long-term facilities during the pandemic. This type of severe and prolonged isolation has become a growing concern, with some experts concerned that extreme loneliness could cause more health concerns than the virus itself.

"While there is a public health mission to protect our vulnerable populations from COVID-19, that pursuit should never send residents into a state of solitary confinement with no personal contact from family or friends for months," Kolkhorst added. "This legislation sees that our most fragile Texans will never be left alone again."

Specifically, the legislation accompanying constitutional amendment, SJR 19, codify a resident's right to designate an essential caregiver, and directs the health agency to establish guidelines to ensure resident and staff safety during caregiving visits. These specific guidelines will provide certainty and consistency for caregivers, residents, and long-term care providers.

Passed with bipartisan and unanimous support, SB 25 and SJR 19 now head to the Texas House for consideration.
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