

## **PE1841/CC**

Catherine Russell submission of 12 March 2021

I support this petition from Natasha Hamilton for five reasons:

The most important person in the life of a vulnerable adult in a care home, their husband, wife, parent or child is not dispensable.

Since March 2020, more than 15000 people have died in care homes cut off from the people who meant most to them.

Even now, with care homes asked to 'open with care' there is a massive disparity between residents with good access to their loved ones and those getting no meaningful access at all.

Residents and relatives need to be reassured that they will not be constantly locked out again

Such legislation would provide a level playing field for care home operators and build confidence that residential and nursing home care can still be a positive choice.

When the pandemic struck, we all understood the need for a temporary lock down given the speed with which this new virus was spreading. By April and May, care homes in Europe were reopening to admit people's close relatives. But a full year on, many designated visitors in Scotland are still pleading for their first visit.

The Government and Directors of Public Health have made a fundamental error. They have counted the most important people in the life of someone in care as unnecessary footfall. But we are so much more than that. We provide personal care, companionship and love. And without us, many people in care have declined at a rapid pace. By all means reducing footfall may be necessary, but do not cut out people's husbands, wives and the person closest to them. By securing the right to see one essential caregiving relative or friend, more people in care would have thrived throughout the pandemic. Powers of Attorney and Guardians would not have been left with no agency at all in the life of their loved one.

Between 12 March 2020 and 12 March 2021, more than 15,500 people have died in care homes. These figures exclude care home residents whose deaths took place in hospitals. Covid 19 has been a factor in a fifth of these deaths. Many died without relatives ever being called. Some relatives got minutes to say goodbye to loved ones who were already unconscious, having been kept away from them for many months. The grief their families are experiencing goes way beyond what would normally be experienced when someone passes away late in life. It was inhumane in the extreme and had proper infection prevention and control measures and PPE been used, they could have been enabled to see their loved ones through their final year.

In October 2020, after discussions with the Care Home Relatives Group, the Scottish Government introduced improved guidance but only 10% of our members ever benefited from this. In March 2021, more efforts are being made to ensure care homes 'open with care.' But this is no more than an expectation. While some relatives are already seeing loved ones for two or three-hour visits with touch, many have heard nothing at all despite

all their pleadings. They are desperate. Others are given lateral flow tests and restricted to 30-minute distanced visits once a week with a relative who is both blind and deaf. Their human rights to privacy and family life are forgotten. Their rights under equalities legislation are disregarded. Expectations are not rights. The legislation requested in this petition would at least secure a minimum standard of access for all.

Even those who are being 'allowed' to visit at present have no security this situation will last. Every positive rapid test of a member of staff, every new variant and every new bug will close a home in a heartbeat and we will be left out in the cold once more. We cannot live like this. Families need to know that at least one relative will always be enabled to be with their loved one and keep everyone in the loop about how they are doing.

Finally, I believe such legislation would be good for the sustainability of residential and nursing home care and indeed all group living. It would give operators a level playing field. Public Health Directors and Care Home Operators would know that the presence of one essential care giving relative is a given, to be factored into their management of a care home and every bit as vital as the paid carers, the cooks, the cleaners or laundry staff.

I would therefore request that the petition is included in the legacy document to the next Parliament when action should be taken as a matter of priority to secure some rights for vulnerable people in care homes.