

Senate Committee on Health & Human Services
TCDD Comments on SB 25
March 10, 2021

Chair Kolkhorst and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 25. My name is Lauren Gerken, and I am a Public Policy Analyst for the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD).

Established by state and federal law, TCDD is governed by 27 Governor-appointed board members, 60 percent of whom are individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) or family members of individuals with disabilities. The Council's purpose in law is to encourage policy change so that people with disabilities have opportunities to be fully included in their communities and exercise control over their own lives.

A TCDD Council Member, Paul Cardarella, has a daughter living in a Texas State Supported Living Center. Due to COVID-19, that facility imposed visitation restrictions that exacerbated the isolation some people with disabilities already experience when living in a facility. To give the Committee a better understanding of the restrictions' impacts on Texans with disabilities and their families, I offer you the following remarks from Mr. Cardarella, which were previously provided to the Committee in regard to its interim charges:

We are still restricted from visitation. The state made arrangements for FaceTime calls every other day, and that has certainly eased the pain of not being able to physically see our loved ones. However, the length of time has now surpassed what is mentally acceptable in my opinion. Our daughter is non-verbal, so she can't express herself in words. For a good while we were encouraged because she seemed happy whenever we visited with her, but in the last three weeks she does not seem happy and has cried more than once when we have to say goodbye. That is her telling us this has gone on long enough.

Everyday there are people from outside the campus coming in bringing supplies, food, etc., for the residents. They are screened, of course, but so could be parents and loved ones. The caregivers would be much more careful to not come if there was a problem, and they would be screened when they got there, as well. With the 5-minute testing procedure we could be assured there was not a problem. It just seems to us that our issue may have been overlooked because perhaps there are other "more pressing" issues. It is time to put this issue on the front burner because the State, which appropriately shut the campuses down at the appropriate time has now become guilty of overreach, no matter the reason. The local SSLCs have already developed a plan that allows for safe visitation, but the decision to implement is out of their hands. In my opinion, further delay in allowing the disabled community to have access to their loved ones has become inhumane and needs to be corrected now.

Over the last year, we have all learned the toll not seeing our loved ones takes, but for some people in long-term care facilities, there is nothing new about this normal.

Thank you again for your time. Please do not hesitate to contact TCDD with any questions.

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