



April 24, 2024

House Committee on Health and Human Services
Rhode Island State House
HouseHealthandHumanServices@rilegislature.gov

Re: **Testimony SUPPORTING House Bill 8153**, authorizing, encouraging, and supporting the establishment of family councils in managed residential communities providing assisted living services.

Dear Chair Donovan and Honorable Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of House Bill 8153.

Advocates for Better Care in Rhode Island represents the rights and interests of residents of long-term care facilities in RI, and works towards resident empowerment, improved care, and an improved quality of life for residents.. We vigorously support H8153, which amends the Assisted Living Licensing Act to **require that assisted living facilities authorize and support a family council, just as nursing homes do**, so that residents' family and care-partners may advocate for the needs and interests of the residents of the community, and to facilitate open communication between the facility administration, the residents, and family and care-partners of the residents.

Nursing homes are required by federal regulations to offer and support resident and family councils, and they have proven very beneficial for residents, families, and facilities alike. This amendment simply applies the same requirement to assisted living facilities.

In traditional assisted-living, an average of 40% of residents have a dementia diagnosis which can inhibit their ability to advocate for themselves, and make care-partner support very important. More and more frequently, assisted living facilities include memory care units, in which families of residents rarely have a means to come together and advocate for their loved ones. Some facilities may convene support groups, but when these groups are led by staff members, rather than by family members, they are not family-directed or resident-centered, and many advocates are not comfortable sharing problems or complaints for fear of reprisal.

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, a leading resident and family consumer advocacy organization, reports that "Family councils can play a crucial role in voicing concerns, requesting improvements, supporting new family members and residents, and supporting facility efforts to make care and life in the facility the best it can be." Recognizing family members as care-partners in

both nursing homes and assisted living provides a vital connection for the resident, family members, and facilities.

Industry lobbyists have argued that administrators are “always happy to put together a meeting of family members if requested,” but family members want the ability to meet independently, and **in my conversations with numerous administrators, most have been reluctant to support such activities.**

The bill includes a clause to require that any resident not living in a dementia care unit consent to their family member’s participation. There is no cost to the residents or the facility, no need for involvement from the DOH, and the State Ombudsman’s Office is available to support facilities and families in the establishment and support of the councils. **Councils can indeed decrease managerial workload, as families speaking with one voice is more efficient than individual complaints and meetings with numerous care-partners.** California benefits from similar legislation, and Connecticut has recently passed their own version.

We urge you to support H8153 and to grant family advocates of assisted living residents in Rhode Island the same rights as those of nursing home residents.

We are happy to provide any additional information or answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your time and attention, and for all of your work on behalf of all Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Gerard,
ABC-RI