



ALLIANCE FOR BETTER LONG TERM CARE

March 26, 2025

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

Re: Support for House Bill 5169 (Assisted Living Resident Empowerment Act) & House Bill 5170 (Nursing Home Family Council Support Bill)

Dear Chair Donovan and Members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of House Bills 5169 and 5170, the Assisted Living Resident Empowerment Act and the Nursing Home Family Council Support Bill. These critical measures will strengthen resident and family advocacy in Rhode Island's long-term care facilities, ensuring that residents and their families have the tools they need to advocate for quality care and a better quality of life.

My name is Keri Salinger, and I am the Chief Operating Officer of the Alliance for Better Long Term Care, the nonprofit that houses the Rhode Island State Long Term Care Ombudsman Program. Through this work, I have witnessed the significant impact that strong resident and family councils can have on improving care, addressing concerns, and enhancing the overall experience of those living in assisted living and nursing home settings.

Resident councils provide a structured, independent platform for residents to share concerns, express grievances, and collaborate with administrators and staff. They ensure that residents' voices are heard, facilitate open communication, and create a safe space where residents can advocate for themselves without fear of retaliation. These councils also play an active role in planning activities, educating residents and staff, and forming committees focused on specific improvements.

House Bill 5169, the Assisted Living Resident Empowerment Act, ensures that assisted living residents and their families have the necessary support to establish truly independent councils. While many facility administrators claim to encourage these councils, in practice, obstacles often arise that prevent them from operating freely. This bill will guarantee that these councils are recognized and supported, empowering residents to advocate for their rights and their well-being.

Family councils play an equally vital role, particularly in residences with dementia care units, where families must navigate complex care decisions. These councils provide a much-needed space for family members to connect, support one another, and advocate for their loved ones. However, when these councils are overseen by facility staff, many family members do not feel comfortable speaking openly. Independent family councils ensure that families can actively participate in care planning and work together to improve conditions for all residents.

House Bill 5170 complements these efforts by strengthening the ability of families and care partners in nursing homes to form independent councils. Currently, nursing homes cannot prohibit family councils, but this bill ensures that regulatory language aligns with that of assisted living facilities, making it easier for families to organize without undue influence.

Residents of assisted living facilities and nursing homes deserve the right to organize, advocate, and hold facilities accountable for the care they provide. The passage of these bills would be a meaningful step toward ensuring transparency, accountability, and resident-centered care in Rhode Island's long-term care system.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to support House Bills 5169 and 5170. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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