A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT PROVIDING PATIENT VISITATION RIGHTS THAT WILL NOT BE IMPACTED
DURING DECLARED DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES AND APPROPRIATING
FUNDS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, DIVISION
OF HEALTH SERVICE REGULATION, TO DEVELOP AND DISSEMINATE TO
HOSPITALS FREE INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS EXPLAINING THESE RIGHTS.

Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused great uncertainty and anxiety across
our State and has significantly affected the medical community, including hospitals; and

Whereas, hospitals have made many efforts to keep patients and employees in a safe
environment, and have endeavored to minimize, to the extent possible, the risk of spread of the
coronavirus disease; and

Whereas, as a result of COVID-19 prevention measures, many unintended
consequences have occurred to hospital patients who were not diagnosed with COVID-19; and

Whereas, the General Assembly has become aware of numerous patients across our
State who were not diagnosed with COVID-19, but as a result of hospital visitation policies have
been prohibited from having any visitors, including a spouse, parent, close family member,
guardian, health care agent, or caregiver; and

Whereas, as a result, many patients not diagnosed with COVID-19 have been forced
to be alone during their treatment for serious conditions, traumas, illnesses, heart attacks, and
routine and emergency surgeries; and

Whereas, some of these patients have been forced to be alone for the entire course of
their treatment and in some cases have died alone; and

Whereas, many families have been unable to be physically present with their loved
ones while in the hospital setting and have been limited to electronic video communications, if
any, with the patient; and

Whereas, the patients who have been affected in the above-described manner have
included adults, minors, and individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities; and

Whereas, the General Assembly finds that it is in the interest of the State and its
residents that hospital patients be allowed at least one immediate family member, designated
health care agent, guardian, or person standing in loco parentis physically present at reasonable
times throughout the hospitalization; Now, therefore,

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. This act shall be known as "The No Patient Left Alone Act."

SECTION 2. Article 5 of Chapter 131E of the General Statutes is amended by adding
a new section to read:
§ 131E-79.3. Patient visitation rights during a disaster declaration or public health emergency.

(a) During a period in which a disaster, emergency, or public health emergency has been declared, a hospital licensed under this Article shall ensure the opportunity for at least one visitor to visit a patient admitted to a facility. This visitation shall be subject to the guidelines, conditions, and limitations of the normal visitation policy.

(b) In the event a minor is admitted to a hospital licensed under this Article, at least one parent, guardian, or person standing in loco parentis shall be allowed the opportunity to visit and to be present while the minor patient is receiving hospital care. If a custody order or written child custody agreement is in place, the custody order or written child custody agreement shall control. This visitation shall be subject to the guidelines, conditions, and limitations of the normal visitation policy. When the visitor cannot be in the room with the patient due to a medical procedure or other reason, the visitor shall have access to a waiting area.

(c) One immediate family member or designated health care agent shall have the opportunity to visit an adult patient admitted to a facility licensed under this Article. This visitation shall be subject to the guidelines, conditions, and limitations of the normal visitation policy. When the visitor cannot be in the room with the patient due to a medical procedure or other reason, the visitor shall have access to a waiting area. If the patient has the capacity to make decisions, the patient may designate the one visitor. For purposes of this subsection, the term "immediate family member" means a spouse, child, sibling, parent, grandparent, grandchild, or the spouse of an immediate family member, and the term includes stepparents, stepchildren, stepsiblings, and adoptive relationships.

(d) Notwithstanding the provisions of G.S. 131E-112, Chapter 166A of the General Statutes, or any other provision of law to the contrary, the visitation rights specified in this section may not be terminated, suspended, or waived by the hospital, the Department of Health and Human Services, or the Governor upon the declaration of a disaster or emergency under Article 1A of Chapter 166A of the General Statutes.

(e) No hospital licensed under this Article may require a patient to waive the visitation rights specified in this section.

(f) A hospital licensed under this Article may require a visitor to submit to health screenings necessary to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, and notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this section, a hospital may restrict a visitor who does not pass the screening requirement or who has tested positive for an infectious disease. A hospital may require a visitor to adhere to infection control procedures, including wearing personal protective equipment.

(g) Each hospital licensed under this Article shall post in a conspicuous place on the licensed premises informational materials developed by the Department of Health and Human Services explaining the rights specified in this section.

SECTION 3. The Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Health Service Regulation, shall develop and disseminate to hospitals licensed under Article 5 of Chapter 131E of the General Statutes free informational materials explaining the rights specified in G.S. 131E-79.3, as enacted by Section 2 of this act.

SECTION 4. There is appropriated to the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Health Service Regulation, the sum of five thousand dollars ($5,000) for the 2019-2020 fiscal year, to develop and disseminate to hospitals licensed under Article 5 of Chapter 131E of the General Statutes free informational materials about the patient rights specified in G.S. 131E-79.3, as enacted by Section 2 of this act.

SECTION 5. This act is effective when it becomes law.