

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2019

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SENATE BILL 730  
Health Care Committee Substitute Adopted 6/11/20  
Appropriations/Base Budget Committee Substitute Adopted 6/17/20  
Fourth Edition Engrossed 6/19/20

Short Title: The No Patient Left Alone Act.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

May 14, 2020

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."



1           **SECTION 2.** Article 5 of Chapter 131E of the General Statutes is amended by adding  
2 a new section to read:

3 **"§ 131E-79.3. Patient visitation rights during a disaster declaration or public health**  
4 **emergency.**

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

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

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

25       (d) Notwithstanding the provisions of G.S. 131E-112, Chapter 166A of the General  
26 Statutes, or any other provision of law to the contrary, the visitation rights specified in this section  
27 may not be terminated, suspended, or waived by the hospital, the Department of Health and  
28 Human Services, or the Governor upon the declaration of a disaster or emergency under Article  
29 1A of Chapter 166A of the General Statutes.

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

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

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

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

44       **SECTION 4.** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of  
45 Health and Human Services, Division of Health Service Regulation, the sum of five thousand  
46 dollars (\$5,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, to develop and disseminate  
47 to hospitals licensed under Article 5 of Chapter 131E of the General Statutes free informational  
48 materials about the patient rights specified in G.S. 131E-79.3, as enacted by Section 2 of this act.

49       **SECTION 4.1.(a)** The provisions of the State Budget Act, Chapter 143C of the  
50 General Statutes, are reenacted and shall remain in full force and effect and are incorporated in  
51 this act by reference.

1           **SECTION 4.1.(b)** Except where expressly repealed or amended by this act, the  
2 provisions of any other legislation enacted during the 2019 Regular Session of the General  
3 Assembly expressly appropriating funds to an agency, a department, or an institution covered  
4 under this act shall remain in effect.

5           **SECTION 5.** Section 4 of this act becomes effective July 1, 2020. The remainder of  
6 this act is effective when it becomes law.