



Issue in Brief: Essential Caregivers Act

Problem:

While long-term care residents in New Jersey have a legal right to unrestricted, in-person visits with family and friends, that right was suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many residents suffered as a result of the forced isolation.

Solution:

The Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) supports enactment of Bill [S2814/A2471](#) (commonly known as *The Essential Caregivers Act*) to ensure that residents can always receive certain visitors — even in a public health emergency — as long as the designated visitors adhere to the same infection control practices as staff members.

Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic was a case study in how well-meaning infection control precautions can go too far, isolating residents from each other and their loved ones.

Social connection is crucial to older adults. For people in long-term care, engaging in activities with peers and receiving visits from loved ones can boost their emotional well-being. Isolation, on the other hand, has been found to drive depression and cognitive decline, chronic health conditions such as hypertension and cardiovascular disease, and even premature death.

Bill S2814/A2471 would empower residents (or their guardians or legal representatives) to designate at least two essential caregivers who must be allowed to visit in person regardless of any emergency, outbreak, epidemic, or pandemic that is affecting the nursing home.

Essential caregivers can be anyone the resident chooses — family member, friend, or religious or spiritual guide, for instance. The visitors would be required to follow the same infection control policies as facility staff members.

The legislation is identical to Bill [A4040/S1825](#) from the 2024-2025 legislative session. The bill did not advance out of committee in either chamber.