



Physicians Caring for Texans

March 24, 2021

**RE: House Bill 2211 by Rep. Metcalf: Relating to in-person visitation with hospital patients during certain periods of disaster**

Dear Chair Klick and Representative Metcalf:

My name is Debra Patt, MD, and I am an oncologist in Austin. I am also chair of the Texas Medical Association's (TMA's) Council on Legislation. I write to you today representing TMA, an organization of more than 55,000 physician and medical student members.

Thank you for your attention to the important matter of caregiver visitation at hospitals during a public health disaster. Texas physicians have seen, front and center, the devastation COVID-19 has had on our sickest patients over the past year, battling for their lives in the intensive care unit for days. The devastation has been not only from the infectious disease threat, but also from the sheer toll on admitted patients' mental, physical, physiological, and spiritual health due to isolation.

TMA physicians have witnessed firsthand these challenges, in which in the summer of 2020, TMA convened organizations representing both acute and long term care facilities to adopt a joint statement to the governor and HHSC on the importance of in-person visitation that sought to balance the needs of patients and the infectious disease threat to others within the facility.

TMA absolutely understands the needle that must be thread in order to balance both appropriate infectious disease control and allowing limited visitation for needed caregiver support.

We are extremely grateful to Chairman Metcalf, who prior to session approached TMA and other health care organizations to work on his proposal. We anticipate a future substitute, which TMA can support, which will address our following concerns:

- Allowing facilities the ability to limit the duration and frequency of visitation;
- Permitting a hospital to deny entry or remove a visitor who refuses to comply with requirements such as health screenings and wearing appropriate PPE;
- Requiring PPE meet the appropriate protective standards of the facility (included in filed version);

- Provision of liability protection for physicians in the event the visitor contracts or transmits a communicable disease on campus or elsewhere;
- Addressing instances of staff shortages that may necessitate temporary visitation restrictions; and
- Permitting a facility to quarantine patients who have an infectious disease. (included in filed version)

We thank you for your consideration of our comments. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Troy Alexander, Director, Legislative Affairs at [troy.alexander@texmed.org](mailto:troy.alexander@texmed.org) or (512) 871-9997.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Debra Patt', is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Debra Patt, MD  
Chair, Council on Legislation  
Texas Medical Association