

February 3, 2024

PROPONENT

IN PERSON

Lauren Shiffman

SB352

Dear Chairwomen Gossage and distinguished members of the committee,

Today, I stand before you not just as an advocate but as a witness to the profound challenges and shortcomings our healthcare system faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially concerning patient rights and the critical need for patient advocates. The pandemic has passed, but the lessons it taught us remain urgent and compelling. We are presented with a pivotal opportunity to rectify past mistakes and fortify our healthcare policies for the future.

My testimony is personal. It revolves around my mother's experience in a hospital during the pandemic. After battling COVID-19, she developed pneumonia that necessitated emergency care. Alone, frightened, and vulnerable, she was admitted to a hospital that, like many others at the time, had enforced stringent visitation restrictions. In her weakened state, without her recollection or knowledge, she was not given a written consent form, but instead verbal consent for treatments she barely understood. There were only some standard protocols we were comfortable with; when I asked her about which consents she had given, she said she hadn't given any consent because she never signed anything. But unknowingly, she did. I think we can all agree that consent is only consent when you understand what is happening. This was not right.

For two days, my attempts to be by her side—to offer not just emotional support but to advocate for her care—were met with bureaucratic hurdles. When I finally managed to be with her, the change was immediate and tangible. Together, we navigated her treatment options, ensuring she received the care she needed and deserved. My presence facilitated her recovery; we walked the room to get her lungs working again, which became a pivotal factor in her discharge and recovery. This experience underscores an undeniable truth: the presence of an advocate can be life-altering.

Stories like my mother's were far too common during the pandemic. They highlight a systemic flaw that we must address proactively. This is why I urge you to support and pass this bill, which seeks to ensure patients' right to have an advocate present, especially during times of crisis. This legislation transcends political lines and speaks to our shared values of compassion, dignity, and respect for human rights.

SB 352 is not just a response to past crises but a forward-looking measure to ensure that no patient ever has to endure what my mother and countless others went through. It aims to establish clear protocols for patient advocacy, balancing the need for public health safeguards with the indispensable role of personal support and advocacy in healthcare.

In conclusion, I implore you to pass SB352 out favorably. It is not just a legislative proposal but a moral imperative. The right to have an advocate is fundamental; it is a lifeline that can make a profound difference in outcomes and patient welfare. By passing this bill, we affirm our commitment to a healthcare system that prioritizes patient-centered care, dignity, and compassion above all.

Thank you for your attention and for considering this vital piece of legislation. Together, we can ensure that the lessons learned from the pandemic lead to meaningful, lasting change.

Sincerely,  
Lauren Shiffman  
Lenexa, KS