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Hospitals Ordered to Allow Support for Disabled Patients

Connecticut has reached a agreement with the federal Department of Health and Human Services requiring that health care facilities allow disabled patients to have a support person accompany them.

By [Associated Press](#), Wire Service Content June 9, 2020

By [Associated Press](#), Wire Service Content June 9, 2020, at 12:38 p.m.

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Hospitals Ordered to Allow Support for Disabled Patients

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By PAT EATON-ROBB, Associated Press

Health care facilities in [Connecticut](#) will be required to allow disabled patients to be accompanied by a support person despite restrictions imposed on visitors during the coronavirus pandemic, according to an agreement announced Tuesday between the state and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The agreement stems from the case of Joan Parsons, a non-verbal 73-year-old woman with aphasia and short-term memory loss who was denied a support person at Hartford Hospital. Her family said she suffered physically and mentally before she was released from the hospital.

The state already had a policy allowing support people for individuals with disabilities receiving services from the state Department of Developmental Services. But the federal agency's Office for Civil Rights said that left out large groups of people with disabilities.

“We’ve heard many heart-wrenching stories of people literally dying alone during this crisis,” said Roger Severino, the HHS director of the Office for Civil Rights. “This goes a big step toward assuring that people with disabilities are not left alone and not left to fend for themselves when reasonable accommodations can be made.”

Dr. Ajay Kumar, the chief clinical officer for Hartford HealthCare, said the system has been making exceptions to its no-visitor policy on a case-by-case basis and is committed to providing access and support for the disabled.

“We take this very seriously, especially the individuals that require extra care, and we've been doing it all along during the COVID crisis as well,” he said.

Parsons' daughter, Susan Fandacone, said the family was not allowed access to her mother, who suffered from kidney problems and COVID-19. She said because her mother could not communicate, doctors missed several issues, there was a lack of consent for certain tests, and her mother was restrained. Parsons was eventually released from the hospital.

“If you can imagine somebody without short-term memory, it's like waking up in the middle of the night and people with masks, that you don't know, are coming in and inflicting pain on you,” she said.

The agreement was implemented through an executive order by Gov. Ned Lamont. It comes as Hartford HealthCare and other systems begin relaxing their policies and allowing visitors for all patients with strict social distancing.

But Severino said he expects the agreement will set a precedent for other states and for the future.

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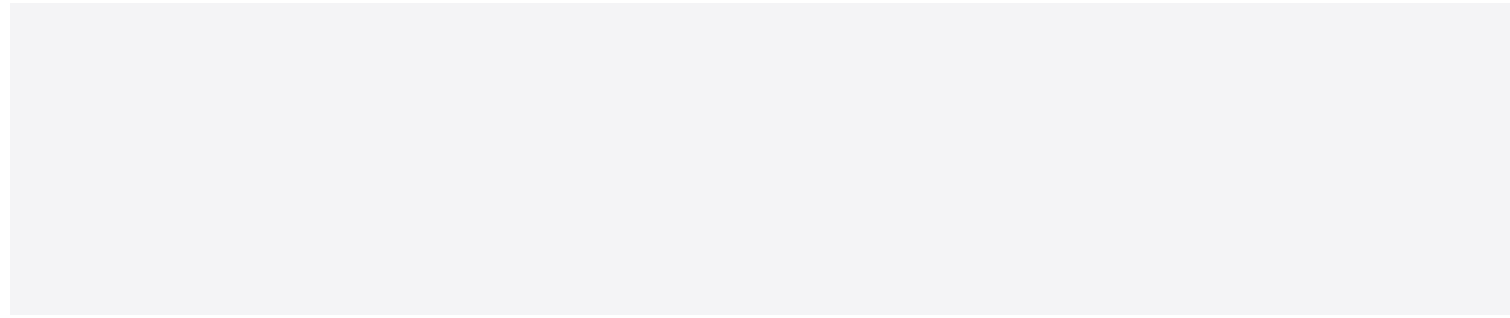
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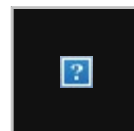
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