

NCCNHR National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform

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1975–2006: Working Together for Quality Long-Term Care

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Dear Senator:

The National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform strongly urges you to vote against S. 22, the Medical Care Access Protection Act. This bill would protect nursing homes from accountability for abusing and severely neglecting elderly and disabled Americans in their care.

On April 28, NCCNHR released a book, *The Faces of Neglect: Behind the Closed Doors of Nursing Homes*, which profiles 36 ordinary Americans whose lives were unnecessarily shortened and whose last days were spent in excruciating pain because of neglect or abuse in a nursing home. Most of them developed deep pressure sores, a preventable and often deadly result of neglect. Some had limbs amputated, and others died from infection. There were other deaths and serious injuries involving malnutrition, dehydration, falls, sexual assault, drowning, severe muscle contractures, second degree burns, strangulation, gangrene, and aspiration pneumonia. Many had chronic, severe pain and permanent loss of quality of life. And their treatment was costly -- \$180,000 and more in some cases to treat pressure sores, amputate limbs, and try to heal other injuries.

Sadly, in only a few of the cases did state regulatory or licensing agencies penalize the facilities or individuals that perpetrated the abuse. The residents' families filed civil lawsuits because it was the only way they could obtain justice for a mother or father who was severely mistreated. Most of these families could not bring a lawsuit if S. 22 became law because it would severely limit non-economic damages, the only compensation available for the pain and suffering of an elderly, non-wage-earning American.

S. 22 would diminish the safety and dignity of our parents and grandparents. Moreover, it would protect those who neglect and abuse them and increase the risk that any American may face who suffers a stroke, develops Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease, has severe arthritis, breaks a hip, or is seriously disabled in an accident. Please oppose S. 22.

Sincerely,

Alice H. Hedt
Executive Director