S.B. No. 52

AN ACT

relating to the right of state hospital patients to designate an essential caregiver for in-person visitation.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1.  Chapter 552, Health and Safety Code, is amended by adding Subchapter F to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER F. RIGHT TO ESSENTIAL CAREGIVER VISITS

Sec. 552.201.  DEFINITION. In this chapter, "essential caregiver" means a family member, friend, guardian, or other individual a patient, patient's guardian, or patient's legally authorized representative selects for in-person visits.

Sec. 552.202.  PATIENT'S RIGHT TO ESSENTIAL CAREGIVER VISITS. (a) A patient, the patient's guardian, or the patient's legally authorized representative has the right to designate an essential caregiver with whom a state hospital may not prohibit in-person visitation.

(b)  If a patient is a minor, the patient's parent, guardian, or managing conservator may designate both of the minor patient's parents as essential caregivers under Subsection (a).

Sec. 552.203.  ESSENTIAL CAREGIVER POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS. (a)  Notwithstanding Section 552.202, the executive commissioner by rule shall develop guidelines to assist state hospitals in establishing essential caregiver visitation policies and procedures. The guidelines must require the hospitals to:

(1)  allow a patient, patient's guardian, or patient's legally authorized representative or, for a minor patient, the patient's parent, guardian, or managing conservator, to designate for in-person visitation an essential caregiver;

(2)  establish a visitation schedule allowing the essential caregiver to visit the patient for at least two hours each day;

(3)  establish procedures to enable physical contact between the patient and essential caregiver; and

(4)  obtain the signature of the essential caregiver certifying the caregiver will follow the hospital's safety protocols and any other policies, procedures, or rules established under this section.

(b)  A state hospital may not establish safety protocols under this section that are more stringent than the safety protocols the hospital establishes for hospital staff.

Sec. 552.204.  REVOCATION OF ESSENTIAL CAREGIVER DESIGNATION. (a)  A state hospital may revoke an individual's designation as an essential caregiver if the individual violates the hospital's policies, procedures, or safety protocols established under Section 552.203.

(b)  If a state hospital revokes an individual's designation as an essential caregiver under this section, the patient, patient's guardian, or patient's legally authorized representative or, for a minor patient, the patient's parent, guardian, or managing conservator, has the right to immediately designate another individual as the patient's essential caregiver.

(c)  The commission by rule shall establish an appeals process to evaluate the revocation of an individual's designation as an essential caregiver under this section.

Sec. 552.205.  TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF ESSENTIAL CAREGIVER VISITS. (a)  A state hospital may petition the commission to suspend in-person essential caregiver visits for not more than seven days if in-person visitation poses a serious community health risk. The commission may deny the hospital's request to suspend in-person essential caregiver visitation if the commission determines that in-person visitation does not pose a serious community health risk.

(b)  A state hospital may request an extension from the commission to suspend in-person essential caregiver visitation for more than seven days. The commission may not approve an extension for a period that exceeds seven days, and the hospital must separately request each extension.

(c)  A state hospital may not suspend in-person essential caregiver visitation in any year for more than 14 consecutive days or 45 days total.

Sec. 552.206.  PROVISION OF NECESSARY PATIENT CARE BY ESSENTIAL CAREGIVER.   This subchapter may not be construed as requiring an essential caregiver to provide necessary care to a patient, and a state hospital may not require an essential caregiver to provide the necessary care.

SECTION 2.  As soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act, the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission shall prescribe the guidelines and adopt the rules required by Subchapter F, Chapter 552, Health and Safety Code, as added by this Act.

SECTION 3.  This Act takes effect September 1, 2023.

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I hereby certify that S.B. No. 52 passed the Senate on April 6, 2023, by the following vote:  Yeas 31, Nays 0.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_    Secretary of the Senate

I hereby certify that S.B. No. 52 passed the House on May 19, 2023, by the following vote:  Yeas 142, Nays 1, two present not voting.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_    Chief Clerk of the House

Approved:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_             Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_           Governor