

Why Nursing Home Residents Need the Essential Caregivers Act

Featuring
Tony Chicotel
*California Advocates
for Nursing Home Reform*



This time on Code WACK!

Imagine being cut off from Mom - *a nursing home resident* - for months. You can't bring her favorite foods, or help dress her, hug her, or even hold her hand. For thousands of families during the COVID-19 pandemic, this became a heartbreaking reality. And without new laws, advocates say, it could very well happen again.

That's why they are fighting to ensure our loved ones are never again separated from those they depend on most in nursing homes and other long-term care settings

Today we're speaking with **Tony Chicotel**, senior staff attorney with **California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform**, or **CANHR**. For decades, Tony has fought to protect the rights of nursing home residents. And he says the isolation and neglect that families experienced during COVID was one of the most painful chapters of his career.

This is part two of a two-part series on the **Essential Caregiver's Act**.

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WE DISCUSS

Tell us about the conditions for nursing home residents and their families during COVID and why you are fighting to pass the federal Essential Caregivers Act?

CHICOTEL: ... suddenly, it's Armageddon like the unthinkable has happened where the family members are completely cut off or almost completely cut off, but certainly directly cut off from seeing their loved ones or being in the facilities. And many cases that they had visited daily to provide direct support to these residents and now could no longer get into the building. They were super concerned..

... at the same time that we cut off this vital resource for residents, we were also suffering from, you know, unparalleled understaffing in nursing homes. And the staff who were there were just overwhelmed with infection control protocols that they previously hadn't had to adhere to.

I think for me, the biggest lesson learned from COVID is how vital caregivers are, how vital these family members are to the support and the outcomes of these residents. And ... one way that we can acknowledge how important they are is to protect that access no matter what happens.

Helpful Links

[HR 6766: The Essential Caregivers Act of 2025](#), *GovTrack.us*

[California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform](#) (*CANHR*)

[Study finds significant weight loss in residents of assisted living facilities during the COVID-19 quarantine](#), *University of Texas Health Science Center*

[Lessons learned from social isolation in nursing homes during the COVID-19 epidemic](#), *Springer Nature Link*

Guest Biography - Tony Chicotel

Tony Chicotel is from Huron, Ohio and a graduate of Muskingum University (B.A.) The Ohio State University College of Law (J.D.) and the University of California School of Public Policy (MPP).

Since 2006, Tony has worked for [California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform](#), also known as CANHR.

His primary work is to promote the rights of residents in long term care facilities - through litigation, legislation, regulatory policy, and consumer education.

Tony's focus areas include: civil rights, eviction defense, dementia care, incapacity and decision making, conservatorship, and end-of-life care.

Host Biography: Brenda Gazzar

Brenda Gazzar, the host and co-producer of **Code WACK!**, has produced over 300 weekly podcast episodes, topping 400,000 downloads. A skilled interviewer and storyteller, Brenda brings nuance, curiosity, and clarity to every conversation.

Brenda has worked as a multilingual and award-winning reporter with more than two decades of experience in California and the Middle East.

Her work has been published by Reuters, Ms. Magazine, USA Today, Los Angeles Daily News, the Orange County Register, The Wrap, The Jerusalem Post, Cairo Times, and numerous other publications. She speaks Spanish, Hebrew, and moderate Arabic and is the recipient of national, state, and regional awards.

Brenda also enjoys being a life coach, helping people align with their purpose so they feel fulfilled while achieving their boldest dreams.

Brenda's work is grounded in a belief that systemic change and personal growth go hand in hand — and she's here for both.

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Keywords

Code WACK!, HEAL California, Tony Chicotel, California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform, Brenda Gazzar, Essential Caregivers Act, essential caregivers, nursing home isolation, long-term care, family caregivers, caregiver advocacy, nursing home residents, elder care, disability rights, healthcare justice, Medicare for All, single payer healthcare, nursing home reform, COVID, COVID lockdowns, aging with dignity, social isolation

Transcript

[Read this week's transcript](#)

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