



Office of the General Counsel for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte

Joe Dodge - General Counsel

December 6, 2021

Priests and Administrators
Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte

Re: Good News!
Access to Patients in Hospitals

Dear Father,

As I indicated to you in my March 24, 2021 correspondence, several priests of the diocese have experienced difficulties providing pastoral care to their parishioners who were hospitalized with COVID-19 during the pandemic. If you are one of those priests, you know first hand how difficult it has been to work through these time-sensitive situations.

Fortunately, the matter has now been definitively resolved by the North Carolina legislature. The governor has signed into law the requirement that clergy be permitted access to their parishioners at the hospital. I have attached a copy of the law for your reference. While you will still have to jump through a few hoops, at least now there is a clear roadmap to follow.

If you find yourself in a situation in which a hospital employee is denying you access, I suggest you provide a copy of the attached document to the hospital personnel and then contact me to discuss our options.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Dodge".

Joe Dodge

Enc.

cc: Reverend Msgr. Patrick J. Winslow, J.C.L., V.G. Chancellor (w/enc.)

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2021

SESSION LAW 2021-156
HOUSE BILL 447

AN ACT PROTECTING THE RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OF HOSPITAL PATIENTS BY PRESERVING THEIR RIGHT TO RECEIVE VISITS BY CLERGY MEMBERS DURING HOSPITAL STAYS THAT OCCUR DURING A DECLARED DISASTER OR EMERGENCY.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. Part 2 of Article 5 of Chapter 131E of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 131E-84.05. Patient visitation by clergy, including during declared disasters or emergencies.

Notwithstanding G.S. 131E-84, Chapter 166A of the General Statutes, or any other provision of law to the contrary, each hospital licensed under this Article shall allow a clergy member to visit any patient admitted to the hospital who requests or consents to be visited by a clergy member during the patient's hospital stay, including a hospital stay that occurs during a declared disaster or emergency. A hospital may require a visiting clergy member to submit to health screenings necessary to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, and, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this section, a hospital may restrict a visiting clergy member who does not pass a health screening requirement or who has tested positive for an infectious disease. A hospital may require a visiting clergy member to adhere to infection control procedures, including wearing personal protective equipment, as long as the infection control procedures do not interfere with the religious beliefs of the patient or the visiting clergy member."

SECTION 2. This act becomes effective October 1, 2021.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 3rd day of September, 2021.

s/ Jim Perry
Presiding Officer of the Senate

s/ Harry Warren
Presiding Officer of the House of Representatives

s/ Roy Cooper
Governor

Approved 11:53 a.m. this 16th day of September, 2021

